

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am an Australian citizen and write to give my response to the above proposed legislation (Bill).

I believe that freedom of speech and freedom of expression is paramount in any democratic society. I also believe that this Bill is a threat to that freedom.

No single organisation (in this case, ACMA) should be able to define what is "truth" and what it is not. What makes people within this organisation qualified to make these delineations? Who will keep watch over that organisation? Also, things believed to be true have been found to be false at a later time. As an example, consider how, in the 1970s, being homosexual was considered something that could be counselled away or ignored. Now we see that completely differently. How can debate about and, hence, discovery of the original error, take place if anything contravening this defined "truth" be prevented?

If a Bill such as this were to be passed, there could be no exemptions, particularly the current or a specific government. Everyone would need to "play" by the same rules. For a government to be exempted from this proposed legislation would be terribly suspicious - it would set them above the law applied to the people who have voted them into power; the people it serves.

Additionally, discussions of all non-violent kinds should be encouraged! Members of society should be educated to understand that there are always multiple ways to interpret the same situation. Something that I find offensive, and believe to be true, you might find completely palatable and vice versa. How can we be sure that people can form their own opinions if they are not encouraged to discuss all possibilities?

Removal or restriction of freedom of speech and freedom of expression lead to reduction in freedom of thought, of ideation. There are problems to solve in our society and in our world. We need all of the free thinkers we can find in this day and age!

The Bill also seeks to grant ACMA the ability to gather information about people who post information on social media platforms. This seems quite an overreach to me. My understanding is that, generally, this type of information cannot currently be obtained unless there is a reason to do so, requiring a warrant, or similar. One of the fundamental tenets of the internet, from its inception, through to its current-day format, is for people to remain anonymous when they so desire. Certainly, government organisations gathering or obtaining information about people and their social media posts removes one of the freedoms of the internet as it was originally intended.

Whilst keeping people physically safe, that is, to continue to disallow incitement of violence, we should encourage discussion in all formats, from classrooms to online social platforms. It should not be hampered, labelled as "truth" or "misinformation" and members of society could also learn that the phrase "to take offence" implies that there is an action taken by the person who is offended. They could also be educated to undertake research of their own, rather than basing their opinion on one person's social media post.

Yours Sincerely,

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