

Re: New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation (the *Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023*)

In recent times, in particular since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our citizen's rights have been severely restricted. Business, education and freedom of movement have been curtailed, and our freedom to question the decisions of the government during this time was hindered. Now, looking back, it is obvious that the government made gross mistakes; for example, forcing vaccines and lockdowns upon the population, even when it was known that they did nothing to stop transmission. Also, the closure of schools means that now, our young generations are severely behind in their education and development. Families were ripped apart through border closures, and people were not permitted to visit their dying relatives. Businesses have suffered, even closed, and our county is hit with debt, inflation and untenable interest rates as a result.

Now, the federal government wants to implement this draconian amendment to force social media platforms to even further restrict our right to question our elected leaders' decisions. This goes against everything a healthy democracy stands for. How afraid must a government be, that it wants to forcefully suppress all forms of open debate and doubts raised by the very people that elected it?

An open, brave media, both traditional media and social, is essential for the healthy functioning of a modern, free society. People must be allowed to express themselves freely. A one sided media, only parroting the views of the running government, is nothing but state propaganda akin to the news platforms in countries like China and Russia. Is that where our leaders wish to take us?

We already have laws in place to protect us from hate speech and other obvious negative actions. No more laws on the matter are required. If ACMA pushes through with this abysmal legislation, the government will become the sole owner of 'truth', and our democracy will be severely diminished. Instead, we need more openness, more debate, and a government that is humble and capable of answering to criticism.

In closing, I strongly oppose this law, and any other, that will empower ACMA and the Australian government to further curtail our democratic right to free expression.

Kind regards,

Judith