

Friday 18th August, 2023

TO: - Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Subject:-

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my strong concerns and opposition to the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. As an Australian citizen and a passionate advocate for free speech and open dialogue, I find this bill deeply troubling and believe it threatens the foundations of our democracy.

First and foremost, the bill assumes that the government and its accredited institutions are the sole arbiters of truth and can determine what is true or false, without considering the experiences and viewpoints of ordinary Australians. This approach negates the diversity of viewpoints that is crucial in the process of sense-making and undermines the importance of considering all possibilities. By deplatforming certain views before they can even be shared, this bill restricts and stifles the necessary diversity in our public discourse.

Moreover, this bill presents ordinary people as incapable of engaging in a public sense-making process without the potential of causing serious harm. This presupposition is both condescending and undermines the fundamental principle that all citizens have the right to express their opinions and ideas freely. By suggesting that the viewpoints of ordinary people are more likely to cause harm than those of the government or its accredited journalists and educators, the bill further marginalizes and suppresses the voices of everyday Australians.

Another concerning aspect of this bill is the threat of interference, which is directed towards both digital platform providers and ordinary users of digital platforms. The threats imposed on digital platform providers, such as making reputation-damaging records and imposing business inconveniences, have the potential to cause significant financial loss or even insolvency. This heavy-handed approach creates an atmosphere of fear and distrust, which is detrimental to both businesses and the public.

Similarly, the threat to haul ordinary users before the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) under Section 19 is deeply unsettling. Such actions not only cause undue stress and distress but also waste the valuable time of Australian citizens. It is especially concerning that individuals may be forced to report on their friends, families, or political co-agitators, further eroding the sense of trust and community that is essential in our society.

This level of government intervention and control over public discourse is reminiscent of oppressive regimes and stands in stark contrast to the values of our nation, where mateship and a sense of community are cherished ideals. The potential fines and penalties imposed on those who choose not to comply with unjust reporting requirements are fundamentally unfair and unjust.

Additionally, independent media organizations, journalists, and bloggers will be burdened with complex reporting standards and misinformation reports, with the clear intention of tarnishing their reputation. This places non-accredited competitors at a severe disadvantage, pushing them towards unprofitability and, ultimately, extinction. It is evident that this bill aims to manipulate public opinion by favouring government-approved journalists while silencing alternative perspectives.

As this proposed legislation gains traction, it will inevitably lead to a proliferation of misinformation and disinformation reports aimed at discrediting non-approved journalists and publications. This distortion of the media landscape will serve to financially benefit government-approved journalists in the long-term, while suppressing open debate and diverse viewpoints that are vital for a healthy democracy.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to reconsider the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. This bill not only undermines freedom of speech and stifles diversity of thought but also raises concerns about government overreach and control over public discourse. It is imperative to ensure that any legislation aimed at combating misinformation and disinformation does not impede the rights and voices of ordinary Australians or encroach upon our democratic values.

Thank you for considering my concerns. I appreciate your attention to this matter and trust that you will act in the best interests of our great nation.

Yours sincerely,

