

Submission Regarding the Misinformation and Disinformation Bill

I am a mother of four children; previously a school teacher and an Australian citizen who grew up so proud of our country, which was founded on Judeo/Christian values. A country which valued freedom of speech as an integral part of its democracy. This is why I strongly oppose this proposed Bill and believe its impacts would be devastating for people of all beliefs and faiths in Australia.

This Bill places too much power into the hands of our government to define what truth is and to empower a censorship regime which partners with anonymous bureaucrats; enabling tech companies to silence our freedom of speech, without the necessary transparency and accountability for themselves. This represents a double standard when government-authorized content is above censorship, but all other Australians will be censored differently. It is a definite overreach by the government to deem themselves the ultimate authority of truth and to dictate censorship of online speech that it considers to be "harmful".

This Bill's definition of "harm" is not specific enough and could therefore allow freedom of speech regarding important issues to be suppressed. Restricting freedom of speech in this way is to deny Australians their basic and essential human rights.

Let's consider religious freedoms as an example. Over 60% of Australians identify as religious. McCrindle research shows 9 in 10 Australians believe people should be able to share their religious beliefs if done in a peaceful way, regardless of whether they are different to a mainstream common view. This freedom of speech should be available to all Australians regardless of their different faiths, verbally or online. In what is meant to be an egalitarian society, there must be a place for non-prejudicial differences of opinion. All people should be allowed to disagree with another person's beliefs respectfully; or express their beliefs that may be different to another's...respectfully.

The impact of this Bill should it be passed, would be devastating; as it does not have a sufficient standard of accountability and oversight for censorship powers who can misuse this power.

This Bill denies Australians their right to freedom of speech, undermines democracy and our fundamental human rights, which we have always upheld and valued since we became a nation. I would therefore strongly oppose this Bill. Thank you for taking time to consider my submission.