

To Whom It May Concern

To borrow a quote from Dr Carmen Lawrence [Fear & Politics, 2006, pg5] if I may, in response to the new ACMA legislation amendment to combat misinformation and disinformation bill of 2023, she say's "have we lost our sense of proportion when measuring prudence and fear, and whether we are sacrificing tangible freedoms for a spectral safety"?

Afterall we should be proud of our nation, a rich history we are told to celebrate a rich heritage and culture built on the back of many a "rebel and scallywag". Those who possessed the gumption to bring 'winged-keels' to yacht racing to beat the American's at their own game. Interestingly of note, how these two nations share a rich tapestry of building greatness on a market of free ideas. Where to come up with something "NEW" – which by its very nature, is the strictest definition of 'misinformation' - and make it succeed, should the free-market forces desire it so. In other words, the new or 'mis-informed' idea either thrives or dies in a manner akin to "survival of the fittest" because Aussies *were* iconoclast's in "smelling the BS". Or as witnessed in 1983 as we overcame the American's, excelling in our most rambunctious, novel and outrageous of ideas.

Examples of these rebels – those who propose "new ideas to the marketplace"- abound. To name only one, Dr Barry Marshall 'dissident' opinions for bacterial pathogenic aetiology to peptic ulcers and gastric cancers - rather than adhering to the popular consensus at the time, the prevailing theory being one of *stress* – back in 2005, we honoured his crazy new idea (rather than censor of Dr Marshall for 'misinformation') with a Nobel prize in physiology or medicine.

If speech is labeled "misinformation" or "disinformation" ascertained to be "harmful"-speech for it's *hypothetical capability* to kill people or at least traumatize them for life, the justification for continuance to silence speech runs a potentially unending gamut. Afterall, one's man's information is another person's harm. We equally miss the next Nobel prize winner too. Besides wasn't education about dystopian-times as read in novels where speech that is permitted by government (and social media companies) is *the only* speech that 'Big Brother' approves and allows, supposed to be a warning, rather than a blue-print for policy adaptation.

Taking recent years into account, it was obvious early in 2020 that at the top of the permitted category of *permitted-speak* is any speech that supports or agrees with statements of the public health "experts" regarding Covid. We now know Freedom of Information documents (FA 22/12/00629) revealed by Senator Antic, show that from the start of the so-called pandemic up to 15 Dec 2022, the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) referred many thousands of social media posts that they believed to be in breach of big tech platforms' community guidelines. This comes as a surprise, given that the Department's purview includes border security, counter-terrorism, and immigration, but not public health. Which if the DHA now has objectives extending beyond it's intended aims, what will the next "cab of the rank" be for the government, this department and internet-hosting services and social media enterprises?? Can we presume speech around other significantly societal transforming matters such as from "The Voice", to "Climate-Change", to forced recognition of a gender my children where not assigned at birth, to the soon to be implemented "new digital-ID lifestyle" will this ALL be captured under this umbrella of censored 'non-governmental approved' speech?? (Where does it stop??)

The last few years alone is riddled with too many extraordinary and innumerable examples of blacklisting, from social-media posts to other forms of messaging and to individuals themselves, many champions in their field to mention here. To quote the WSJ* (July 7, 2023), “Social media platforms were powerful tools for full spectrum censorship, but they didn’t act alone. Medical schools, medical boards, science journals and legacy media sang from the same hymnal.

Legions of doctors stayed quiet after witnessing the demonization of their peers who challenged the covid orthodoxy. A little censorship leads people to watch what they say. Millions of patients and citizens were deprived of important insights as a result.”

[<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-censorship-proved-to-be-deadly-social-media-government-pandemic-health-697c32c4>]

To further paraphrase this WSJ article; We can appreciate how our government may feel threatened as the information explosion (that the internet and social-media) has enabled, it has provided the means by which many more people than ever to quickly identify the mistakes of officials (and learn the truth). Yes, these new technologies permit “lies to travel around the world before the truth barely has had a chance to put its shoes on”, but paradoxically it is the spreading of information through the conduit of these technologies that allows us to compile the data quickly, correct errors, find facts and dispel falsehoods. Thus, both immediately and in the long run, actually save lives.

Indeed, a great example would be to demonstrate how the World Health Organisation spread misinformation in March 2020 where they declared a “pandemic” largely based on a fatality rate of 3.4%. However, this was shown to be conclusively wrong as early as February 2020, as we already knew the age stratification of Covid-19; we knew it impacted the elderly and the ill, but was mild in young people and children. By the time of the WHO’s declaration that week, Stanford professor John Ioannidis, a meta-research specialist, and one of the most cited scientists in the world, presented an analysis of Covid-19 case fatality ratio, leading to a “reasonable estimate for the case fatality ratio in the general US population vary(ing) from 0.05 to 1 percent”.

Similarly, the journal Disaster Med Public Health Prep [June, 2020] article considers the possibility misclassifying an infection fatality rate as a case fatality rate, with the WHO potentiating the perceived harms as (more than) 10x higher. A simple case of misclassification, not unlike the error that enabled the loss of the Mars Climate orbiter in 1999 because of a simple measurement mismatch between NASA and Lockheed Martin.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32782048/> Public Health Lessons Learned From Biases in Coronavirus Mortality Overestimation.

I would certainly be alarmed at your ability to censor the speech or remove the messaging of the World Health Organisation for their spreading of misinformation and disinformation with errors in over-estimation over the last number of years. Similarly the rocket-scientists at NASA, because of a rudimentary error by using the wrong units.

I will happily defend their right, or any organisation’s right to speak to any matter regardless of how erroneous or offensive it may be (to you or I). It’s why we should have no quarrels with McDonald’s or a Coca-Cola ability to sell ill-health provoking substances through

marketing campaigns that we all could argue are built on misinformation and disinformation campaigns. They have a right to do so, even though I find them in error (causing much morbidity and mortality) and offensive in their messaging (that I can not wholly protect my children from hearing) it must in a free-western society, be permitted to exist. Both you, the minister for communications and I know this.

(Despite it travelling *fast*) Lies, misinformation and disinformation *does not* make it around the track too many times. It creates its own demise. Your censorship campaign will only hide the crazies. Theoretically, it could of hidden ‘briliant’ ideas from the likes of a Ben Lexcen or a Dr Barry Marshall. Free expression works because when you do, you put your reputation at stake. Your approach will only undermine the mechanisms society has for refuting and learning and thus, finding the truth.

History has shown that censorship has evoked as much harm and damage than any campaign of misinformation has ever done. History also clearly shows, censorship is often on the side of the ‘bad guy’. Censorship only curtails scientific understandings and advancement, if lessons from many great scientists and discoveries demonstrate, from Galileo to Dr Ignaz Semmelweis to the aforementioned, Dr Marshall.

Dr Lawrence’s (2006) postscript describes this nation of people who are controlled by fear, where its exploitation is the stock in trade for our politicians. By pushing our panic button, politicians can control us. Disappointingly, all these years later, it continues. We have failed to manage our fears and face the realities of this complex world. Where once (as she describes) we were a nation who knew when someone was taking us for a ride, a defining element of us, a bunch of resilient iconoclasts who could not be stampeded into frightened submission. We look now to be a nation of ‘nervous nellies’ easily pushed into panic mode by “media hype and political manipulation”. We must ponder this more than ever, especially 3 years on from when many of states in our nation placed us in a “State of Emergency” potentially based on mis-information back in March 2023. Open discourse must remain. No silencing of either side will get us to real justice or the truth.

I fail to conceive how precisely the ACMA bill 2023 can possibly do anything to prevent our panic or alleviate any harm it is said to prevent?

The ever expansion of collusion of government with big tech, industry (such as pharma), academia, behavioural psychologists and think-tanks to steer public conversation and suppress inconvenient truths veers sharply away from the democratic ideals that our great Australian society is founded on. In a world where the experts were always right, this would only be a violation of our freedom of expression and thought. But as we know from the last few decades but especially the last few years, countless experts got it wrong, a lot, which makes the current form of “Censorship Industrial Complex” and the one you intend to expand with this bill, a violation of truth itself.

Just to conclude, as someone with recall of just the last two decades, who now appreciates the error in my ways for being aligned with John Howard’s advocacy for the “war on terror”, I would like to know If you are to demand my advocacy for the new ACMA amendment bill of 2023, what are the REAL costings for this curtailing of *this* “misinformation and disinformation” you speak of??

Not to mention, PRECISELY what (or when or upon whom) is *this* “misinformation and disinformation” enforced onto, effecting and regulated by??

To surmise ACMA’s statement “these new powers will enable the ACMA to monitor efforts and require digital platforms to do more, placing Australia at the forefront in tackling harmful online misinformation and disinformation, while balancing freedom of speech” as censorship borne out of fear, by another name. I’d simply conclude with a quote from Dr Carmen Lawrence’s book [Fear & Politics, 2006, pg6], since *CENSORSHIP*, that is this 2023 Bill is borne out of fear; where “... fear cannot be a foundation of moral and political argument and that the necessary antidote to the toxin of fear is a wholehearted embrace of the principles of freedom, equality and co-operation. Human betterment must once again become the prime focus of our politics.”

Kind Regards

Rod