

I am concerned that the proposed legislation will impose more restrictions on our rights to free speech through censorship of social media posts and comments.

First, what constitutes 'misinformation' and/or 'disinformation' that is 'harmful' is to be decided by government, through its appointed body, ACMA. This is potentially dangerous as it is open to broad interpretation, driven by self-interest. It suggests that any view that does not comply with or advance or endorse the narrative that government approves of, should be suppressed through its removal from social media. Online platforms will be forced to censor 'unwelcome' comments due to the threat of onerous fines being imposed by ACMA.

Second, for government to exempt itself and its surrogates from opinions that may be construed as 'mis/disinformation that is harmful' *when voiced by others*, is cynical and self-serving. It suggests that the real intention of this proposed legislation is to censor opposition to the approved narrative. It allows government to be the sole judge of 'the truth' in the pursuit of its agendas. No opposition is to be discussed/tolerated. Orwellian, indeed!

One of the hallmarks of a democracy is freedom of expression of views that not everyone may agree with. During the Covid period, we saw consistent overreach by government attempting to silence discussion that it had labelled 'misinformation'. In many instances, it was subsequently revealed that the alternative views had been correct, so government itself was guilty of 'misinformation'! Surely, the NO campaign would also be accused of peddling 'misinformation' if government was to have this legislation in place before the referendum is held!

Third, freedom of speech was enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which Australia helped to draft in 1948. It states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through *any media* and regardless of frontiers." In my view, the proposed legislation is clearly in breach of this noble principle which, to my knowledge, Australia is still committed to uphold.

In conclusion, I believe this proposed legislation is designed to impose government-directed censorship of dissenting views. It will restrict the rights of freedom of speech and expression of Australians even more, by stifling and shutting down open discussion and debate.