

Dear Department of Infrastructure, Transport , Regional Development, Communications and the Arts representative,

The following is an attempt to voice my opinion regarding the proposed legislation (Combatting Misinformation and disinformation) Bill 2023.

I have very little training in the law and insufficient time to study the exposure draft, therefore my comments, though addressing the exposure draft bill will focus on the principles.

The design of the proposed bill is to introduce a level of governance focussed on censorship provided through threats to private and publicly owned communications enterprises. This appears to be outsourcing policing (censorship) activities without any form of reimbursement for work done on behalf of the Government.

There are protections for political speech but it can be argued that all speech is political at some level, and to be recognised as political speech and be protected under the bill, it would be required of political speech that it be attached to the speaker's name and address, this would have a very chilling effect on political speech as well as generally. Why should Australian citizens have their opinions, work or experiences subject to censorship? The internet, digital platforms, provides opportunities for communication, why should the government force internet providers to police communication? Why is the government so expert about information that it can decide what information is , misinformation or disinformation? The government has not displayed any degree of infallibility to date, even legislation and policies often end up being clarified or worse in courts.

Australia has a reputation as an egalitarian country. This Bill would damage that reputation by preventing Australian citizens from free access to hear and communicate with each other. Only government approved information would be acceptable. The digital platforms might over-do their censorship for any number of reasons, examples could include, fear of punishment from government, misunderstanding government communications or even attempting to curry favour with government or other interests. I am not fear mongering, there many examples of governments exercising control of national communications with horrible results, communist countries typically control what their populations can see and many Australians do not think this is desirable. They (communist governments) claim censorship is to protect their people in a similar way that this proposed Bill will. I certainly do not want the government protecting me in this way. I do not know anyone who wants to be protected in this way.

We have recently been exposed to the government dealing with a pandemic. I was very unhappy with the way things were done. The normal medical procedures were tossed out the window and digital platforms acted as police for and on behalf certain narratives, and did much to silence information that did not suit their narratives and, opposing voices. Australians want to be free to hear and look up dissenting views, what the government might call disinformation or misinformation, just ask us! Government claims to want to protect us, but we want freedom. Australians want freedom to see and consider, to ask questions and enter into debate. This proposed bill will no doubt end up before our courts.

This Proposed Bill might be described as a power grab. We, the Australian population, are not the children of the government but rather we the people employ the government to govern for us. We do not need or want this particular type of protection. What about protecting our children from pornography? What about protecting our children from drugs? What about product labelling that shows the place of origin of the ingredients, packed in China from local and imported ingredients or contains less than 10% Australian ingredients does not satisfy.

How will we ever know the truth if the government employs digital platforms as thought police? Please ask the people of Australia if they want this Bill passed by our representatives.