

Hannah McLeod-Boyle



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SUBMISSION

New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation.

Dear Sirs and Ma'ams,

Thank-you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate inquiry on Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare.

Please find attached my submission.

My submission may be published.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Hannah McLeod-Boyle

SUBMISSION

New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation.

In this submission I identify the following concerns:

1. The ignoring of personal responsibility.
2. The overstepping of boundaries.
3. The integrity of those bringing this bill to the table.
4. Those who define the wording.
5. Those given exemptions.
6. The excessive penalties.

1/2. The ignoring of personal responsibility & the overstepping of boundaries.

Two major issues of this bill revolve around who should have responsibility. People know there is mis and disinformation on the internet. It is up to people to sift through and research to find the facts. It is up to the people to have fair, even-keeled debates to identify the truth. It is not the Government's place to decide what is truth or to force the removal of anything it deems 'harmful.'

The Government should encourage its people to learn how to think, act with personal responsibility, and seek truth.

It should not, and has no right to, decide what people should think, remove anything it disagrees with from the eyes of its people, or decide what truth is.

3. The integrity of those bringing this bill to the table.

I have no interest in a smear campaign against Mr. Albanese or his government. So, to keep this point streamlined, I shall present three facts about our current government and work from there.

Fact one: Part of Mr. Albanese's pre-election promises was that his government would focus on the practical needs of Australians. The obvious needs including the cost-of-living pressures bought on by interest rate hikes, high fuel prices, increasing food prices, and rent prices/housing shortages. Thus far, the Albanese government has failed to uphold these promises – entirely or by proposing something several years away.

Fact two: The Albanese government has been very active in climate change. Specifically, in reaching net zero. Australia is responsible for less than 5% (1.09% if my search was correct). If we slid under the sea tomorrow, the world would not be in a better climate position. Yet, one area of this bill concerns, "Harm to the Australian environment."

Fact three: Another area where the Albanese government has been very active is Mr. Albanese's Voice to Parliament. Which the government has spent/allocated \$365 million toward.

If you consider that fact one is what was promised to the Australian people and consider that facts two and three are where the Government's intentions and interests lie, one must ask about the integrity of those who present this bill. The resources being poured into climate change and the Voice could vastly alter the struggles of everyday people and uphold the promises the Albanese Government is breaking. This also calls into question the legitimacy of the intent behind this bill. Especially with this bill being proposed now, it smacks of a

desire to censor anyone who disagrees with Mr Albanese, or his government's, agendas. This drives me directly to points 4 and 5.

4. Those who define the wording.

Who defines the meaning of 'truth,' 'misinformation,' 'disinformation,' 'harm,' and 'hatred?' This bill relies on these words.

Under this bill, these definitions are left to the arbitrary decisions of the government, or ACMA.

This has many dangers. How do we trust that those in charge won't abuse their power and change the definitions to suit their desires?

What stops the government from censoring anything posted in opposition to its agendas.

We have already seen this government censorship with Covid. Many posts regarding vaccine alternatives, heart damage caused by vaccines, dangers of lockdowns, etc. were taken down.

Now, we know all of those things were legitimate concerns.

What stops the government from censoring those against freedom-destroying takeovers like the current one in the ACT regarding Calvary Hospital?

What stops the government from censoring anything against the Voice to Parliament now that it is losing popularity? In fact, misinformation has become the new catchword regarding anything to do with anti-Voice Australians, as the below media drop from the Prime Minister's Office to the Sydney Morning Herald shows.

*"Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will link the **growing international wave of misinformation** to the campaign against the Indigenous Voice to parliament, saying he is optimistic Australians will look past a confected culture war and support the referendum.*

*"In an **attempt to discredit his critics**, Albanese will on Sunday claim that democracy is under threat..."*

There is no reason to see the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 as anything other than a power grab to censor any voices the Government sees as a threat to its chosen narrative. Specifically, a power grab that allows those doing the power-grabbing control over the very words used to indict people as guilty.

5. Those given exemptions.

A further concern is the alarmingly few people with exemptions to censorship.

Government communications, comedy/entertainment programmes, professional news content, and private messages.

In other words, the only people/things not able to be censored are those that already agree with the Government the majority of the time, and the personal online spaces so intimate that the Government can't censor them without freaking people out.

6. The excessive penalties.

Another issue with this bill is the outrageous penalties. Penalties of up to \$2.75 million. And individuals could be penalised with fines of up to \$0.55 million.

These numbers are designed to strike fear into companies and make them the Government's watchdogs. This power to silence people is one the government doesn't have the right to. In which case, internet platforms certainly don't have that right.

To summarize.

The Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is a dangerous bill that gives the Government the power to silence anyone who doesn't agree with its agendas on a topic.

This bill should NOT be implemented in any way.