

My response to the draft of the Communications Legislation Amendment  
(Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Article 18 Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19 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 frontier

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives all humans the right of free speech. It is a cornerstone of democracy which should be cherished and promoted rather than controlled and diminished. You only have to look at the dictatorships of the current political world where there is no freedom of speech and those who support it are usually in jail or dead.

My concern with the proposed legislation is that it gives government the opportunity to suppress legitimate political dissent as being labeled misinformation because it is contrary to government policy. As the Australian Human Rights Commission has stated "There is a real risk that efforts to combat online misinformation and disinformation by foreign actors could be used to legitimize attempts to restrict public debate, censor unpopular opinion and enforce ideological conformity in Australia". We have already seen this occur in the public arena where people of faith who have expressed a viewpoint different to the LGBTQI agenda have been accused of promoting hate speech when in fact it is just a different point of view. As Winston Churchill once said, "Everyone is in favor of free speech. Hardly a day passes without its being extolled, but some people's idea of it is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone else says anything back, that is an outrage".

If the Government or its bureaucracy is given the power to enforce their own political views and penalize anyone who gives a different opinion then free speech in our country no longer exists. Whether the government chooses to do this themselves or compel public platforms to conform because of the threat of massive fines then our ability as a nation to discuss, debate and learn from that debate has been diminished. We are then no longer a democracy when truth is decided by the government of the day whatever their persuasion.

Truth is absolute. Postmodern relativism says that I can have my truth and you can have your truth and we can both be right. Unfortunately this is impossible. Government does not have the monopoly on truth as we have seen over the last decades a succession of politicians who have appeared before the courts on various charges using related to not telling the truth but using their political power to gain favour and wealth at the expense of truth. It is worthwhile noting that the official newspaper of the Communist Government of the USSR for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was "Pravda" which ironically means truth. And I am quite sure that it was anything but true.

Governments are elected to serve all the people not just those who vote for them. To stifle debate because someone disagrees is no better than the school yard bully who enforces his rule of authority by beating up anyone who disagrees. So too is a government who choose to bully the population into ideological conformity by penalizing people or public platforms who have the temerity to put forward a dissenting point of view. To me this sounds like a page out of Pravda!

In brief I am not in support of this legislation as I most strongly believe that it is backward step in maintaining our democratic freedoms of which one of the most important is freedom of speech.