

To Whom It May Concern

We would like to register our concerns with the proposed changes to **Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023**.

Our first concern is that free speech is essential to democracy and that any attempt to limit free speech by designating certain ideas as misinformation, disinformation or malinformation is a direct attempt to control the communications of all Australians.

There is an implicit constitutional right of free political speech. To label that speech as misinformation and try to suppress it, even by third party means as is being proposed, is an affront to the rights and freedoms of Australians.

Our second concern is that what actually constitutes mis/dis/malinformation is mostly subjective. If as proposed, financial penalties are to be imposed on social media companies, these rules will be enforced with an inbuilt bias that will further restrict the inherent free speech rights of Australians.

As we have seen throughout history, controlling information to enforce orthodoxies, initially with the best of intentions, has resulted in disastrous outcomes, such as burning witches at the stake, the Inquisitions, the belief that black people are not fully human and of course the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.

While these examples may seem overly dramatic, they all started with censorship, and control of the narratives, and there is indeed such a thing as a slippery slope, which the above examples amply demonstrate.

Many social and scientific advances came about from the ideas of outsiders, and not from those who had the institutional power to suppress new ideas. One common way to suppress new ideas is to label them 'misinformation'. Galileo's ideas were labelled 'misinformation', as were Semmelweiss' by the ruling establishment of the day. We should not repeat these mistakes.

Our third concern is that the government, educational institutions and mainstream media will be exempt from these repressive laws.

We can't decide if the aforementioned are intending to lie to us all or if they are so filled with hubris that they believe themselves incapable of error. This will inevitably lead to even more loss of trust and respect. This will make a mockery of any belief in a free and democratic society.

We urge our political leaders to abandon this dangerous and ill advised proposal.

Yours Faithfully

Ron and Deborah Mortimer