

Response regarding new Misinformation and Disinformation Laws.

I am writing to object in the strongest possible terms to the proposed amendments to laws governing freedom of speech and granting a substantial broadening of powers to ACMA to limit speech according to its own set of self-determined guidelines.

Introducing laws that give the government powers to control speech and punish individuals for sharing anything that is not considered acceptable according to government guidelines is a key component of a tyrannical dictatorship.

When governments control speech and limit fundamental freedoms, several concerning consequences can arise, negatively impacting both individuals and society as a whole:

- **Suppression of Dissent:** Government control over speech can lead to the suppression of dissenting voices and critical viewpoints. This stifles open dialogue and prevents citizens from expressing their concerns or holding the government accountable for its actions.
- **Erosion of Democracy:** Restrictions on fundamental freedoms erode the democratic principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. In the absence of free speech, the government can become less responsive to the needs and wishes of the people, potentially leading to authoritarianism or dictatorship.
- **Censorship and Propaganda:** Government control over speech can result in censorship and the spread of propaganda. This manipulation of information can distort public perception, limit access to accurate news, and prevent citizens from making informed decisions.
- **Stifling Innovation and Progress:** When governments limit freedom of expression, it hinders innovation and progress. New ideas, scientific advancements, and creative endeavours often flourish in environments where individuals are free to share and explore diverse viewpoints.
- **Fear and Self-Censorship:** Restrictive speech policies create an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship, where individuals avoid expressing their opinions to avoid punishment. This silencing of voices diminishes the richness of public discourse and prevents the exchange of diverse ideas.
- **Social Division and Unrest:** Limiting speech can exacerbate social divisions by preventing open dialogue and understanding between different groups. Lack of communication can lead to misunderstandings, grievances, and, in extreme cases, social unrest.
- **Human Rights Violations:** Government control over speech often goes hand in hand with broader human rights violations. Citizens' right to freedom of

thought, expression, and association can be infringed upon, potentially leading to arbitrary arrests, detention, and even torture.

- **Brain Drain:** Intellectuals, professionals, and creative individuals may choose to leave the country if their ability to express themselves is restricted. This "brain drain" can have negative consequences for a nation's development and progress.
- **Lack of Accountability:** Without the ability to openly criticize and question the government, there is less accountability for its actions. This can result in corruption, mismanagement, and a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the population.
- **Diminished International Standing:** Countries that restrict fundamental freedoms often face criticism on the international stage and may have strained diplomatic relationships. Such actions can harm a nation's reputation and influence in global affairs.

In essence, when governments control speech and limit fundamental freedoms, they undermine the foundations of a free and democratic society, impeding progress, fostering mistrust, and potentially leading to a range of social, political, and economic challenges.

In addition to these points, freedom of speech is crucial in a democracy for several essential reasons:

- **Expression of Ideas:** Freedom of speech enables citizens to express their thoughts, opinions, and ideas openly. This exchange of diverse viewpoints enriches public discourse and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** In a democratic society, the ability to criticize and question those in power is vital. Freedom of speech empowers citizens to hold government officials and institutions accountable for their actions, fostering transparency and preventing abuse of authority.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** Informed citizens are the foundation of a functional democracy. When people have access to a wide range of information and opinions, they can make well-informed choices in elections and other civic activities.
- **Social Progress:** Open discussions, even when they challenge prevailing norms, lead to social progress. It allows societies to evolve, adapt, and address issues that might have otherwise been ignored or suppressed.
- **Creativity and Innovation:** Freedom of speech encourages creativity and innovation by enabling individuals to share new ideas and challenge conventional thinking. This is essential for scientific advancements, technological breakthroughs, and artistic expression.

- **Peaceful Conflict Resolution:** In societies where individuals can freely express their grievances and disagreements, there is a higher likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation rather than resorting to violence.
- **Prevention of Authoritarianism:** Safeguarding freedom of speech acts as a check against the rise of authoritarian regimes. When people can voice dissent and opposition without fear, it helps prevent the concentration of power and the erosion of democratic values.
- **Personal Development:** Freedom of speech encourages personal growth and development. It allows individuals to refine their thoughts through discussion and debate, enhancing their ability to engage in meaningful conversations.
- **Cultural Diversity:** In diverse societies, freedom of speech protects the rights of minority groups to express their unique cultural, religious, and linguistic identities without suppression.
- **National Unity:** Paradoxically, the freedom to express differing opinions can contribute to national unity. By allowing various perspectives to be heard and debated, societies can find common ground and build a shared sense of purpose.

A country where the freedom to express myself freely, and question a dictated government narrative, without fear of punishment or reprisal, is not the Australia I grew up in and love.

I also wish to refer to these websites on freedom of speech in a democracy as a fundamental right and how contravention of these rights is the hallmark of a communist regime.

<https://www.principlesofdemocracy.org/speech-dem>

Specifically I draw attention to: “For a free people to govern themselves, they must be free to express themselves -- openly, publicly, and repeatedly; in speech and in writing.”

“The principle of free speech should be protected by a democracy's constitution, preventing the legislative or executive branches of government from imposing censorship.”

It states it cannot be used to justify violence, slander, libel, subversion, or obscenity, which is logical and widely accepted by a reasonable public.

But democracy ‘depends upon the widest possible access to uncensored ideas, data, and opinions.’

How can the people be assured that governments will wield powers over speech wisely and for the good of all citizens, and not to serve their own ends or impose more controls?

Are we to be governed and controlled so closely because we are not considered intellectually capable of discernment and sound judgement when presented a group of facts from a variety of sources?

In addition I bring your attention to this page on the website of the Australian Human Rights Commission. It makes numerous references to a variety of protections of the right of free speech and freedom of expression including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Common Law Protection, Constitutional Law Protection and State and Territory laws protecting human rights.

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/freedom-information-opinion-and-expression>

Any law that seeks to limit freedom of speech and expression to one dictated to by government or established authority is a major breach of democratic and civil liberties and marks the end of democracy.

Over the last 3 ½ years we have seen a global attack on the freedom of speech on multiple topics, including around the sharing of critical information in relation to health matters.

During this time, anyone who dared question the approved narrative, including highly credentialed, experienced and esteemed medical professionals, were censored and discredited because they dared question the government directive. Many risked and experienced loss of their livelihoods, legal action and fines for daring to ask questions, or state serious and well founded concerns.

Any information, regardless of it's factual basis, was dismissed as misinformation if it deviated from the accepted government approved narrative.

In fact, there has been a significant amount of information that was labelled 'misinformation' or 'disinformation' that has since been proven factual with substantial amount of irrefutable evidence to back it up.

I finish with a quote from a biography on French writer and philosopher Voltaire, by Beatrice Hall who summed up his attitude by stating "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."