

Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 Submission

1 message

David Sampson

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To: information.integrity@infrastructure.gov.au

I am writing to express my concern over the proposed **Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023**.

The ICCPR article 19 states

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice

..and Australia is a signatory to this covenant. It would seem that our current government doesn't have much interest in upholding the rights of its citizens under the premise that we need protection from the harms of misinformation and disinformation.

Some questions and points...

1. Who is the ultimate arbiter of the 'truth'? Government? ACMA? Tech companies? How are any of them supposed to know the 'truth' about every issue and topic? Are we to expect an Orwellian "Ministry of Truth" to accompany this legislation that tell us what is the truth with penalty of censorship for alternative views? How will investigation and research flourish when such activities reveal information that contradicts the 'truth' of the day? Will new discoveries be discouraged and censored when they challenge the accepted "truth"? What we accept as true and false changes all the time owing to those questioning what is commonly accepted and having the freedom and courage to express a minority viewpoint. Often such expression leads to a widespread change to what is accepted as the truth. In my work in the medical field, improvements in health care are driven by questions and research. Having the freedom to explore and challenge norms is essential to progress and improvement in healthcare. Censorship would have quite the opposite effect and cause progress to stagnate.
2. Religious views are often at odds with the mainstream opinion and narrative. Will religious expression be censored when the government adopts a more progressive version of the 'truth'?
3. Definition of harm/ serious harm is vague and leaves this legislation wide open for abuse from anyone who claims that some 'misinformation' has caused harm. All that would be required is for someone feeling victimised or harmed by some mis- or disinformation to make a complaint and they'd have the full support of the legislation behind them to penalise the offender.
4. Information by itself cannot cause harm. There are only a few exceptions that are well covered by existing legislation. It is a lie that speech (or expression) can be violence. This lie must not be perpetuated. Clearly stated, misinformation itself cannot cause actual harm.
5. I don't need or want the government to control content on social media. I have the right to the freedom to choose and weigh up information and make decisions for myself. This legislation will make the Australian people dumb and overly reliant on the government. Government is already too big!

In short, I think this legislation is unnecessary and dangerous

Thank you for your consideration.

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Regards,
David Sampson



