

Misinformation/Disinformation bill

I am a [REDACTED] Federal Electorate constituent, and I am writing to express my profound concern regarding the proposed Misinformation/Disinformation bill.

There are so many seriously alarming facets to this bill.

Misinformation and Disinformation can only be deemed to occur after some “truth” has been “decided”.

Keeping in mind this need to define a truth to determine mis/disinformation, I will list a few of the many points with potentially worrying ramifications that accompany this proposed Bill.

Firstly, that the government of the day will determine what is deemed to be the truth (that is, the “correct” information), and ACMA will enforce compliance with this “so called” truth in online communications, so as to avoid “serious harm”.

In our current pluralistic society, academics often argue that “there is not just one version of truth”. If that is the case, as most in a progressive government would probably believe, how will the Government determine what is the “particular truth” that is to be enforced? Will it be dependent on the ruling dominant ideology of the time?

Surely truth can only come from the free, open, and robust contest of ideas in the open marketplace? Or are we to go back to the times of The Inquisition or McCarthyism, but just with a different powerful and intolerant ideology in charge?

Further, the determination of what should be classed as “misinformation” is fraught, because of the natural evolution of knowledge itself.

In my work as a medical practitioner, I conscientiously advised patients of the medical advice that was current, thought (and taught) to be accurate at the time (for example, on the nutritional management of Type 2 Diabetes in the early 1980s). That medical advice is now superseded because it was challenged. As many of the accepted medical “truths” from the 1980s have now been superseded.

But if new research had been curtailed because it was labelled “misinformation”, how would we have moved onwards in medicine?

Further, it should be noted that the most impressive doctors that taught and mentored my cohort in my career, frequently said that “there is no such thing as a dumb question”. That the science “is never settled”. And in the search for truth, “sunlight is the best disinfectant”.

Censorship has no rightful place in the pursuit of truth in Science. And I believe, in the search for truth generally.

Science has only truly flourished where people are free to question accepted “ways of thinking”. We can only move forward as a civilisation if we are always questioning, and never closing our minds to other ways of doing or thinking. And how can we be a nation of lifelong learners if we are only allowed to be exposed to “truths” that have been decided by faceless bureaucrats or activists?

And significantly, doesn't the Albanese Government respect the Australian population's own agency to determine the truth?

And what are the government's, indeed, ANY government's, qualifications to be the arbiters of truth? To allow a bill like the one proposed, would hand censorship power.... to whom? Academics at Universities? Journalists? Bureaucrats? Parliamentarians?

And there is another matter deep at the heart of a flaw with this proposed bill. We all have our biases, as we are human. And humanity's natural (and seemingly increasing) inclination is to demonise those with opposing views. This human inclination will make this bill more likely to be abused than perhaps it's well-intentioned proponents can foresee.

As an example, in recent months, a very influential, senior journalist from our national broadcaster admitted that he himself, on an issue of international importance that had previously been widely dismissed as "misinformation" in some of the press, was "overly influenced by the fact it was truly nasty, crazy people who were so deep down the rabbit hole. I probably didn't look at it dispassionately enough". As he admitted, "You can be unhinged and still be right."

And yet the [REDACTED] journalist admitted that he hadn't looked at the issue "dispassionately enough" despite the [REDACTED] broadcaster even having a dedicated "fact checking department".

And that goes to a core problem with this proposed bill. People that we approve of, that look, or vote, or "think" like us, do not have a monopoly on truth. Yet we are all human, and often we do not want people or groups that we find repugnant to be correct. Thus, it is not a great step from thinking that people are "unhinged", to thinking that their beliefs and views must also be "unhinged", and hence deciding that those beliefs and views must be stamped out.

And that human inclination appears to be stronger than any supposed protection offered by a "fact checking department".

Indeed, a "fact checking department" may not be dispassionate either.

Further, this Misinformation/Disinformation Bill would empower the Media Watchdog (ACMA) to regulate online communication based on whether it could cause harm. Causing harm is an extremely subjective entity. Almost any communication could be seen to be able to cause harm if harm is being sought. Offense and harm can often be claimed, when really there is just disagreement.

The claim of misinformation/disinformation "causing harm" could easily be weaponised by powerful lobby groups to shut down legitimate debate, thereby creating a chilling effect on free speech in this country.

In a truly diverse, tolerant, and inclusive society, there should be room for diversity of opinions, and beliefs. Freedom of expression should not be held hostage to the prevailing dominant ideology.

And also, what specific qualifications do the unelected members of the media watchdog have to arbitrate whether specific communications legitimately cause harm?

In summary, our nation's search for the truth is too important to be placed at the mercy and whim of Government, bureaucracy, and Big Tech.

Censorship of what is "deemed" Misinformation or Disinformation by ACMA and Big Tech, will stifle debate on important issues, and stymie scrutiny of powerful players.

There is no way to quarantine the effects of such a Bill while preserving free speech. Big Tech will almost certainly pre-emptively curtail the expression of some views and news so as to avoid financial penalties.

The ramifications of such a Bill are too far reaching to coexist amicably with the freedom that our Diggers fought and died for.

This Bill should be rejected in its entirety.

Thank you for considering my submission.