

Everyone has the right to hold free opinions and to freely express them through any medium that they choose. This proposed bill would severely restrict freedom of speech and expression in Australia and allow ACMA to unilaterally and arbitrarily decide what information is true and false and therefore what information should be allowed on the internet and what should not.

It is not the role of the government or any government body to tell what is or is not the truth online. It is not the role of the government or any government body to fact check people's opinions or to deem certain views permissible and others not to be mentioned or discussed. Progress in society comes from free and open debate.

It would be almost impossible to define what is false, misleading or deceptive. In science, for example, there is no such thing as truth. There is just the best current available theory based on the best current available theory or data, all of which is subject to regular change which inevitably occurs.

Scientific debate was shut down and opinions contrary to the public narrative were deemed misinformation early in the pandemic. True and accurate information was flagged as misinformation/disinformation and/or censored based on what the experts were saying who were later proven to be incorrect.

In fact, much of the information given allegedly reputable sources, by government departments and professional news reporters/broadcasters was later found to be false and baseless and yet they would be excluded from scrutiny under this bill.

The threat of massive fines imposed for not adhering the codes or standards means that digital platform providers will likely block content that does not align with the government's position thus impeding free speech.

The bill could ultimately be used to completely silence everyone on social media who disagrees with any "official" narrative as ACMA could deem it misinformation. With ACMA silencing dissent or alternative views on digital platforms, and with mainstream media being exempt from scrutiny, there is the potential of both becoming propaganda arms of the government, which would be harmful to our democracy.

The primary means of information sharing in our current society should remain relatively censorship free. This bill would signal the end of the free marketplace of ideas online and would create scope for manipulation, control and authoritarian censorship.

The ACMA should not be given any new powers to combat online misinformation and disinformation.

There should be no reserve regulatory powers to be used by the ACMA.

The ACMA should not be given the information powers proposed in Part 2 of the Bill.

The ACMA should not be given reserve code registration powers proposed in Part 3 of the Bill enabling it to request the industry make a new code that becomes mandatory and enforceable following registration.

The ACMA should not be given reserve standard-making powers that will have stronger enforcement mechanisms through higher penalties for non-compliance as proposed in Part 3 of the Bill.

This proposed bill breaches the human democratic rights of freedom of speech and freedom of expression of Australians. It is an overreach of governmental authority and should be scrapped in its entirety.