

I am writing in opposition to the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. I believe this bill will be detrimental to Australians in providing undue power both to the government and mainstream media bodies, particularly considering these will be exempt from the rules to which all other groups will be bound. This will essentially allow the government and mainstream media to be the arbiters of truth.

Being accustomed to living in a wonderful country with the freedom to think, speak, consume, consider and believe various opinions, perspectives, narratives and facts, I find this bill to be a jarring government overreach into the lives of Australian people, and will ultimately lead to the silencing of speech of any person or group whose beliefs or perspectives are not aligned with those of the government or mainstream media. This is in opposition to Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a signatory.

The exemption of content that has been authorised by the government creates an imbalanced system where the government has the power to provide accidental inaccurate information without any consequence, yet ordinary Australians and non-government groups face negative repercussions for the same mistake. This will serve to undermine trust in the government.

The ability to live in an environment where free speech is accepted provides all Australians with the opportunity to consider alternative perspectives. The bill's ideological definition of "harm" will enable it to be used to silence those who express ideas that are contrary to ideas presented by mainstream media or the government. For a society to thrive, free and open discussion of ideas must have a place in public forums, and this also serves as the best way to combat misinformation, as Australians will have the opportunity to consider all perspectives and utilise their critical thinking skills to come to conclusions they can trust.

I firmly believe the censorship that will result from this bill goes beyond reasonable limitation. Allowing Australians to retain our fundamental human right to freedom of expression will enable Australians to maintain faith and trust in our government.

In order to limit the negative effects of this bill on society, there needs to be explicit boundaries established to protect sincere expressions of belief that differ to the prevailing ideologies.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to this bill.