

Dear Sirs,

20th August 2023

Re. Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

I hope the irony is not lost on you that it is necessary to make a submission to save freedom of expression and freedom of opinion in a country that is supposed to be a free and fair democracy and champion individual's rights and those of minority groups.

According to the below referenced Government website,
"Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties. The right to freedom of opinion and expression is contained in articles 19 and 20 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)"

<https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/human-rights-scrutiny/public-sector-guidance-sheets/right-freedom-opinion-and-expression>

Article 20 imposes reasonable limitations on the exercise of the rights referred to in Article 19. It is interesting to note that the Australian Government, media and sporting organisations have infringed Article 20 in the manner in which the conflict in the Ukraine has been portrayed. The government and media have pushed the simplistic war propaganda of Ukraine is good because it is aligned militarily, politically and economically with the "West" and has been invaded by its bully neighbour, while Russia is bad because it is an enemy of the "West". Very few if any views or facts have been expressed to the public through main stream sources, including the government, which give a balanced picture of why Russia may have decided, after eight years of provocation by Ukraine and the deaths of an estimated 14,000 ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine regions, to finally enter Ukraine to put an end to this genocide. Is it not a breach of Article 20 to push war propaganda when a balanced view of what is really happening should be given to the public?

Similarly, hatred was expressed towards Russian sports men and women denied participation in certain events, and, when they were allowed to compete, the flag of their nation was not displayed beside their name on televised broadcasts of scores and results as it was for every other tennis player at the Australian Open. This was racial hatred and discrimination at its worst and yet went unpunished and unchecked. So, within the existing legal framework, it appears that freedom of opinion and expression is not respected by government bodies and the media, and infringements are not corrected.

The proposed bill attempts to limit those freedoms for the general public and media outlets but not for the government itself, however, it is the government and its agencies whose misinformation and disinformation has by far the greatest and most dangerous impact on society, since the public treats that information as coming from a trustworthy voice of authority.

Catastrophic economic, personal and relationship damage, not just "harm" as envisaged in the bill, has been inflicted on the Australian public by the official government narrative during the pandemic that started three and a half years ago. In order to defend the public against a virus that has been shown to be no more lethal than a bad flu season, government policies both Federal and State ruined countless businesses, destroyed the economy, caused the loss

of tens of thousands of jobs, divided families, split communities, interrupted education and contributed to a massive increase in mental health problems and suicides.

This was all directly due to policies of lockdowns, non-essential business closures, travel restrictions, border closures, school closures etc. and by misinformation used to justify those policies, and not supported by science, such as asymptomatic spread of a virus (putting huge fear into people), the necessity of mask wearing (many scientific studies totally debunk this), social distancing, curfews, existing prophylactics (ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine) not being effective (they were and are) and only unapproved emergency use gene therapy injections produced by Pfizer, Moderna etc were “safe and effective”. This latter has been shown to be demonstrably untrue by data emerging over the last few years.

During the pandemic years there were many voices on alternative media from many experts including virologists, scientists, doctors explaining at length the errors that were being made by governments worldwide. Many of these were silenced by increasing censorship and cancel culture imposed by social media at the behest of governments. Other platforms appeared for their voices to be heard, but despite all this information counter to the official government narratives very little of this other side of the story got through to the general public because it was not on mainstream TV or news outlets.

It is clear that any attempt by this bill to silence dissent on social media does not address the real issue, which is the huge and devastating effect that misinformation put out by a government and its agencies has on a population. Who is the independent gatekeeper of that misinformation and disinformation in order to protect the public?

Turning to specific flaws in this poorly drafted and conceived bill, definitions of misinformation, disinformation and harm are vague, inadequate and any interpretation of them is purely subjective. The arbiters and judges of implementing this censorship are to be an unelected ACMA aka The Ministry of Truth. George Orwell would be so proud to know that his famous book has had such a far-reaching effect in our dystopian society.

Excluding the government from being subject to this bill is the last straw. If the drafters of this bill believe so wholeheartedly in the voracity of their work, then they should not object to the government and its agencies also being subject to the same vague tests.

This bill is an abomination in a country that claims to be a democracy and value freedom of opinion and expression. If dissenting voices cannot be heard no matter how crazy they might sound, clearly government is very worried that the people no longer accept its narrative as credible, and it might be losing the ability to control the population through media channels loyal to it.

There is an existing legal framework to control hate speech, discrimination and defamation. The proposed bill is completely without merit and not needed. Please do not proceed with it.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy Cragg