

David Tharratt-



**To the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts:**

I vehemently object to, and oppose the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

The proposed bill severely undermines freedom of speech by attempting to 'balance' that fundamental right (to free speech) with the notion of combating so-called 'misinformation'. Fundamental rights cannot be balanced against anything, rather they are undermined.

Determining what qualifies as purported 'misinformation' is subjective, and entrusting a government agency to determine truthfulness raises serious concerns. It is unreasonable to propose that a government agency or officers be designated as 'fact checkers' or 'judges of truth'.

The whole purpose of online platforms, forums, articles, blogs, gatherings, and other channels of communication is to encourage open speech, ideas exchange, debate and information exchange. To propose that content, be it written or spoken, be subject to the judgement of a few selected people from government and privately (government) funded organisations is ludicrous, and without merit.

Purported 'misinformation', unless it incites violence, does not cause direct harm, and defining harm based on subjective criteria is problematic to say the very least.

This proposed bill grants excessive control to authorities and will most certainly lead to censorship and silencing the voices of the people of this country. It is unreasonable to censor the ideas and opinions of people in a democratic country. The very notion of this in un-Australian and will cause harm to millions of people and erode the rights our forebears fought and died for.

Alternative approaches should be explored that do not infringe upon freedom of speech. Making the proposed amendments into law will destroy the people's inalienable right to free speech and must not be accepted into law.