

To: The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

RE: New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation (the Communications Legislation Amendment [Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation] Bill 2023)

Dear Officer,

I am deeply concerned about the new ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation (the Communications Legislation Amendment [Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation] Bill 2023). If it passes, the powers given to the Authority will be way beyond what is necessary to live peacefully in a democratic country like Australia. It is an attempt to centralise the power of communication in Australian society and to control what can be said, read and listened to by a few individuals.

The current legislation is more than enough to control, stop and convict the bad behaviour of a small minority, as the past 30 years of internet and almost 25 years of social media usage prove.

Most people can discern information on any media and make responsible choices and decisions. The government does not need to control such information unless there is a plan to move Australia into a totalitarian state where citizens must believe the propaganda to survive.

Where is the term information defined in the draft bill? What does it include? What does it exclude? What is regarded as mis- or disinformation? Is it the contrary of truthful information? (I guess not...) The bill is vague, and the words are intentionally not defined. Hence, anyone could become a target for anything they say, read, or even think. However, even if we believe something untrue, we don't automatically become a threat to society. Up until now, it always took action to get in trouble.

Anyway, who can say that they always get it right? Who has enough time to read all available information and know the truth? A group of individuals working for the government?

Often, we need discussions, other opinions, and listening to each other before we can make an informed decision. By controlling what is appropriate to say or think, freedom of expression is taken away, blighting new ideas. That is the death of any well-operating society.

It is simply arrogant for any individual or group to think they always know the truth and can distinguish it from mis- and disinformation.

If anyone wants to control information, it is almost always because they want to convey a narrative and shut down any challenging opinions or questions. This tactic is incredibly convenient for information that is not truthful, where evidence does not exist.

During the pandemic, the media stated so-called truthful information on one day and retracted it the very next day by claiming the contrary. The same people will also be exempt from that bill—the people who most likely spread mis and disinformation. I don't think that is a coincidence.

And anyway, why is there a need to combat information? Isn't combat for war? Why is the government at an information war?

History shows that governments controlling what people see, hear, and think are dangerous and always cost many innocent lives.

In summary, this bill is a threat to our democracy and an attack on our fundamental human rights, such as freedom of expression and opinion. It is alarming that the government secures that fundamental human right for itself while seeking to take it away from everyone else.

Australians are responsible individuals who do not need the government to think and make decisions for us or to protect us from information; we need the government to protect our human rights.

Sincerely

Anne Jones