

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,

Please find below my feedback on the exposure draft of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 (the Bill).

I am opposed to this Bill which would allow the Australian Communications and Media Authority to censor, control and define free speech in Australia. That any agency could define truth (the alternative to misinformation or disinformation) is repugnant. Stifling debate stifles knowledge, innovation and fact finding and can lead to discontent on one hand and an overall narrowed intelligence on the other.

The Bill as it stands allows sweeping powers to the ACMA to govern all forms of media with the exception of professional news content, accredited educational institutions, governmental bodies and those producing entertainment, parody or satire. I must say I am glad that comedians are protected in this Bill, but the huge concern is that it gives power to bodies that already carry it and takes power away from individuals who may hold them to account.

This Bill effectively protects the opinion of the Government, educational institutions and the press from community debate. This on it's own would most likely create harm in the community. The opinions and information issued by Governmental bodies, educational institutions and the press need challenging in a healthy society especially where such bodies are often beholden to their own political and commercial masters. That they be held as the benchmark for 'truth' is deeply concerning for if history proves correct 'truth' is a moveable feast.

If we paraphrase Karl Popper, a statement can only be considered scientific if it were open to being disproved. The act of challenging an idea can either add to the weight of the theory or disprove it. Denying free speech and debate through censorship will stagnate the collective intelligence of society, not improve it.

Government and media in particular are well known to publish and disseminate information which is designed to manipulate. Educational institutions can be corrupted by commercial and political pressures. Protecting such entities may introduce more societal harm than protection.

benjamin:smith MSc, BapplSci (hons), DIC