

I would like to raise my objection to this legislation.

Despite the stated intention of not curtailing freedom of speech, this is exactly what this will do as companies will overzealously censor their platforms to ensure that no lines are crossed where they will have to potentially expend any resources to manage complaints, takedowns etc. This chilling effect has already been present on many platforms for years due to the fickle tastes of advertisers and what they consider 'safe' topics (See <https://wfanet.org> for examples of how agendas are pushed purely by controlling the flow of advertising dollars); it will only be amplified under the threat of fines for digital platforms.

Our current government has used the term 'misinformation' recently in relation to healthy political debate regarding the upcoming referendum - I shudder to think what the outcome would be if this legislation was already in place? The thought police would be working in the shadows to silence any dissenting opinions under the guise of 'misinformation'. While the reader may think this is a fantastic outcome, what happens when the readers' views do not align with the current government or 'independent organisation' who is assigned to assess what from their viewpoint may or may not be misinformation or disinformation? Governments change, but the machinery of government previously left in place in overly flexible laws may be used by the next government at their discretion in new and unexpected ways.

With the pandemic in our rear-view mirrors, it is now quite obvious that information on certain health outcomes was judged too soon by digital platforms and in instances 'censored' as misinformation or disinformation. My understanding that this was often done by unqualified 'fact checkers' who didn't always get it right, but their verdict was as good as law, and censorship was enforced with the equivalent power of a law. I have also noted that more than a few of these decided truths have been quietly walked back or quietly dropped with no apologies or acknowledgement to those who raised them. Any organisation or group of organisations who becomes what could be considered an unquestionable 'Ministry of Truth' is a terrifying concept indeed.

One of the most important concepts behind our society and the thought that drives it: "The purpose of thinking is to let the ideas die instead of us dying." If we cannot properly discuss ideas, even if they offend or hurt some people's feelings, we risk far greater hurt and damage to our societies and individuals as a whole due to not allowing bad ideas to die.

There is only one solution to misinformation/disinformation: Publicly argue the points (politically, in the media and social media) and convince people of the truth. The Australian public has demonstrated repeatedly that they are capable of working out the truth when given half a chance, but there appears to be an increasing desire over the last decade to dictate an absolute truth at every moment in time. This usually well-intentioned desire to promote cohesive groupthink is highly problematic and troubling in terms of promoting a lack of independent thought, which acts as the guard rails for our political system. If this censorship, or implied censorship under the threat of fines comes into play, it will further erode people's trust in all media and tech platforms, leading to the weakening of our amazing democracy which requires robust discourse to flourish.