

Dear Sir/Madam,

I strongly oppose the extreme restrictions on free speech and public debate that the Bill represents.

Having been born and raised in the Soviet Union, I am very aware of the harmful consequences that any restrictions on free public debate inevitably bring.

The harm caused by not allowing free contest of ideas is far greater than any harm that can be caused by so called misinformation and disinformation. You only need to look at the societies that went down the extreme censorship and government control route in history, from USSR to Cuba to North Korea - and how well they fared as a result.

I cannot believe that a Bill like this one can even be considered in a free and democratic society, and I urge the government to withdraw this Bill.

The main points of concern for me are:

- 1) The definition of harm is incredibly broad – and no explanation is given with regards to who and how is going to decide what “reasonably” constitutes harm.

Would it have been harmful to suggest at the beginning of the Omicron wave that Covid vaccines do not stop transmission? The consensus at the time was that they do. What about now? The consensus is that they do not. Misinformation may originate from official sources just as well as it does from unofficial – and that is why such extreme censorship is so harmful and should not be considered.

- 2) What about the well-publicised cases of Peter Ridd and Lyle Shelton? Both won in the courtroom – but their views would have most likely been considered harmful under the definition of this Bill just because of the topics they discussed (Peter Ridd, Great Barrier Reef – likely harmful to environment; Lyle Shelton, drag queen story time – likely defined as hatred based on gender and sexual orientation). How could the circumstances of these court cases have ever been publicised and discussed if the professional news networks choose not to report them? Professional news outlets cannot physically report on everything, even assuming they are willing to – so why should we as a society be at the mercy of what they choose to report, even if they do an extremely good and professional job.
- 3) The exclusion of government, news sources and educational institutions also does not make any sense in this context. If speech truly has potential to cause harm, why would any body or institution be exempt? Is it because government bodies, educational institutes and news outlets are somehow presumed to be in possession of some higher truths? If so - why?
- 4) How can political debate and free contest of ideas ever happen if content produced by the government bodies is “excluded for misinformation purposes” – and content produced by the opposition is not?

Once again, I strongly oppose to this Bill that gives ACMA powers to somehow be the ultimate arbiters of truth, and hope that common sense prevails in this matter and that this Bill is withdrawn.

The right to free speech is one of the basic human rights in a democratic society.

Kind regards,

Irena Zagladov