

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications
and the Arts

20th August 2023

Re: Feedback - Combatting Disinformation and Misinformation Bill 2023

I am writing to express my deep anger and outrage regarding the draft bill titled "Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023". As an Australian citizen, it is disheartening to see that our Government does not respect our freedom of speech with the existence of this bill.

One of the most concerning aspects of this bill is the creation of two classes of citizens. The first class includes politicians, journalists, and members of educational institutions who will have the power to spread information online, whether it is deemed true or false. On the other hand, the second class consists of regular citizens, who often possess more knowledge about certain topics, such as industry insiders. This classification threatens to silence the voices of regular people and undermines the democratic ideals that the internet has provided.

Furthermore, the excessive fines imposed by this bill will result in digital services becoming more restrictive than ever before. The code's universal application across the entire industry without any "pressure escape valves" exacerbates the potential harm to freedom of speech. Such constraints will not only stifle open and honest discussions but also hinder the progress of informed debates.

The task of accurately judging what is true or false is an impossible one. Information is dynamic, continuously evolving, and new discoveries often contradict previously accepted facts. To illustrate this, I would like to present several examples of statements that were once considered factual by authorities and expert consensus but were later debunked: masks not protecting from COVID-19, absence of evidence for human-to-human transmission of COVID-19, complete prevention of COVID-19 transmission through vaccination, and the misconception about the required number of vaccine doses. Under this legislation, content similar to the aforementioned examples could be deemed public health harm-causing misinformation and subject to removal. This demonstrates the potential for overreach and disproportionate censorship.

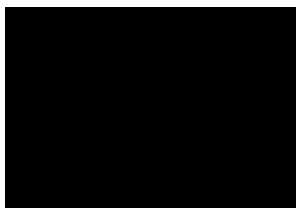
Furthermore, the bill's inclusion of "misleading" or "deceptive" information, even if true, adds another layer of concern. Freedom of speech serves as a crucial cornerstone of open and honest dialogue, allowing room for people to be wrong, and for truth to be sought through debate and discussion. This bill risks eroding the value of freedom of speech and stifles the progress that comes from conflicting ideas.

Even Dr. Nick Coatsworth, a former Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia, who is well-acquainted with the challenges of handling health information, raised serious concerns about the scope and application of this bill via his personal Twitter account. His tweet, dated 25th June 2023, highlights the difficulty of implementing such legislation, as it opens the door for fines to be imposed on information that may turn out to be true after all.

If expert consensus is touted as the basis for this bill, it is troubling to witness one of those very experts expressing such criticism. This raises questions about the bill's credibility and its alignment with the pursuit of truth rather than censorship.

In conclusion, I strongly oppose the "Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023". It not only undermines our freedom of speech but also risks disproportionately silencing the voices of regular citizens. I implore the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to reconsider this bill and ensure that freedom of speech is upheld and protected in Australia.

Yours sincerely,



Submission can be made PUBLIC, without disclosing my personal details.