

I am deeply concerned that The Federal Labor Government is proposing a Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. I see the proposed new powers will threaten freedom of speech and democratic rights in Australia in the following ways:

- ⑩ The Bill grants the government the authority to define truth, allowing them to control and manipulate the flow of information.
- ⑩ Whilst imposing restrictions on online platforms, the Bill gives the government and mainstream media a free pass, creating a double standard and eroding the principles of fairness and equality.
- ⑩ The Bill empowers the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to determine what qualifies as “misinformation” or “disinformation”. This subjective definition leaves room for abuse of power, and suppresses public debate and diverse opinions and perspectives.
- ⑩ The Bill effectively enables tech companies to become tools of government censorship, stifling free speech, privacy of an individual and undermining the open exchange of ideas.
- ⑩ The Bill paves the way for ideological conformity, suppressing dissenting voices and hindering independent thought. This goes against the principles of a democratic society that thrives on diversity and freedom of expression.

Australia is a founding member of the United Nations and an original signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 18 of The Declaration states, that *“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”*

Article 19 even strengthening: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*

Freedom of speech is a fundamental and non-negotiable human right. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right of every Australian. It is the role of the Commonwealth of Australia to recognise that fact and to protect the freedoms that every Australian already possesses.

If the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 would pass, this put the Commonwealth of Australia in breach of its international human rights obligations and at odds with its own nation’s character and values. This is a threshold Australia must not pass.

I urge the the Australian government to withdraw this Bill and uphold the principles of transparency and accountability, fostering an environment where open debate and diverse opinions are welcome.