

Good afternoon,

Concerning the message below that I sent to Information & Integrity re the *Combating Misinformation and Disinformation Bill*, I would like this email to be considered as a submission. I would welcome this message to be published for public viewing.

Contact information:



Sincerely,
Jerome Birch

On 27 Jul 2023, at 4:12 pm, Jerome BIRCH <[REDACTED]> wrote:

To whom this may concern,

My name is Jerome. I am a student in my [REDACTED]'s from [REDACTED]. I would like to raise significant concerns about the Albanese Government's planned *Combating Misinformation and Disinformation Bill*. It has been brought to my attention that this Bill, if legislated, would allow the government to define what truth is and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and online platforms, such as META, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Google and Netflix, the powers to enforce it. The government and mainstream media would, however, be exempt from the rules of this bill.

The Albanese Government is, essentially, legislating to stop what it deems to be "misinformation" (false information) or "disinformation" (deliberately false information). The Bill will give the sitting government of the day the power to silence religious and political speech that contradicts prevailing ideologies and political messaging, whatever it arbitrarily deems to "cause harm." The proposal fails to state what mechanisms will be included to ensure that valid expression of opinion and belief are protected. The powers in this Bill would allow tech companies to censor what the government perceives as problematic speech and impose significant penalties to online service providers. The measures proposed in this Bill are a direct contradiction to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which state:

"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."

Indeed, this proposal has been rightly criticised by the Australian Human Rights Commission, quote, *"There is a real risk that efforts to combat online misinformation and disinformation by foreign-actors could be used to legitimise attempts to restrict public debate, censor unpopular opinions and enforce ideological conformity in Australia."*

This Bill would impose some of the most draconian controls to free speech in the Western world. It is a deliberate attack on Australian's freedom of speech, showcasing a move of overwhelming government overreach that does not align with the values that has made this country such a success on the world stage.

I fundamentally denounce the enacting of this proposal and demand that it be halted.

Sincerely,
Jerome Birch