

26<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Shirley James



Information Integrity Section  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications & Arts  
**GPO 215**  
**CANBERRA ACT 2601**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you to express my concern about 'The Misinformation and Disinformation Bill'.

As the '*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*' states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to see, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers".

Also, the '*Australian Human Rights Commission*' states: "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". They also state: "All efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation need to be accompanied by transparency and scrutiny safeguards to ensure any limitations imposed upon freedom of expression are no greater than absolutely necessary and strictly justified".

I completely agree with the above concerns, and believe their concerns are not addressed in this Bill. I also believe this bill will impose some of the most draconian controls of free speech in the Western world. They are totally inconsistent with Australia's 'International Human Rights' obligations and really are an over-reach on steroids when compared to the 'Declaration of Human Rights'.

This Bill would enable Government bureaucrats, who are not elected by the people to represent us, working through big-tech to silence and censor speech that way exceeds reasonable limitation. It puts too much power in their hands without transparency or accountability. The Bill does not provide a sufficient standard of accountability and oversight for the misuse of these censorship powers.

The framework of this Bill is too vague in its definition of what is false, misleading, or deceptive, as is the definition of harm. This risks it being weaponised, which could potentially shut down legitimate concerned public debate regarding political policies or decisions by Government. The Media is also free of accountability in this regard and therefore have the potential to be corrupted which could lead to heavy handed Government or authoritarian control.

I do not believe it is the role of the digital platforms to police and remove any misinformation and disinformation. The severity of the penalties to the providers and platforms for failing to comply are excessive and are a restrictive control of debating controversial issues. It is a Bill that does not safeguard people's rights to free speech. It gives Government, Bureaucrats, and mainstream media too much power. They will have no watchdog and potentially have the unsolicited authority to say and enforce anything they deem fit.

This is a very disappointing and underprepared Bill. I cannot see any good in the Bill, only harm from a Government narrative which clearly portrays a doctrine of 'My way or the Highway'. Is this Government so intimidated by the Australian people that they need to vet every person's correspondence.

I am appalled at the potential danger to the public and at the precariousness of this Bill.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Shirley James.

Shirley James