

A response to the ***Combating Misinformation and Disinformation bill*** recently put forward by the Labour Government.

The bill as proposed raises very real and frightening concerns about the future of democratic principles in government and for the continuance of the freedoms that Australians all currently enjoy. It seems to be legislation setting the stage for a huge move by the current government to take control of political and social debate around key issues that affect us all. This makes me suspicious regarding the motives of the Government.

The disappointing thing is that this was not fore shadowed in any direct policy statement or communication by the Labour party leading up to the last election! It has simply been sprung on the electorate accompanied by a plethora of media hype and political "spin".

It has been said that this Bill will impose some of the most draconian controls on free speech in the Western world. If the legislation is passed, then many forms of legitimate dissent will be seriously curtailed. The Bill has the potential, if misused, to enable government to silence the voicing of alternative viewpoints and to stymie debate. It will mean that we all have to conform to the dominant ideology of the government of the day and of their political friends. The incredible thing is that the bill exempts any position taken by the government from being considered 'misinformation'.

The ACMA will be given the power to decide whether information (of various sorts) that is posted online is harmful or not. They will be able to decide what is true or false. That is something that we currently have the right and freedom to research and determine for ourselves. It's a right and freedom that we are determined to keep. Claire Chandler rightly states that although we know there is false information online "a good government should trust the public they work for to process and critique what they read".

It seems that bureaucrats within the ACMA and big tech Media, who are not subject to the scrutiny of election, will have the power to control what we say and what we disseminate for other free-thinking people to consider for themselves. In addition there seems to be minimal transparency or accountability for those charged with administering the exclusion of information.

The Australian Human Rights commission has stated that "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". The bill absolutely fails the test as far as I can see. It is not insignificant that there is no religious free speech exemption tagged to the legislation. Of course people of faith will occasionally be at variance with a secular government's position on issues that relate to morality, ethics, and the teaching of values in the home, business, and education environments. Their voice is a legitimate voice and has contributed much good to Australian society in the past. It is a voice that deserves to be heard and considered. It should not be squashed!

I urge the government to withdraw the legislation at this point and to do a serious re-think about it. A considerable amount of time needs to be provided so that all interested parties and stake holders can consider the ramifications of such a bill. Then there should be opportunity to debate the issues involved in a fair and open public forum.

Concerned voter.

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