

## **Public submission regarding: Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.**

Just as our modern industrial civilisation runs on energy, not money, our civil society depends on trust, not enforcement. While trust in politicians and political parties has always been low, today trust in government agencies and media, both old and new, is rapidly falling.

Citizens want to be able to trust government, however many supposedly democratic governments, including in Australia, are engaging in repeated trust destroying actions. This proposed bill amendment is one of those actions. Government censorship is trust destructive. It is said that trust takes an age to build, seconds to destroy, and once destroyed, often cannot be restored. At this critical time when restoring trust is an imperative, it is vital to remember that trust must be earned, it cannot be enforced.

Empowering the ACMA as a “Ministry of Truth” is Orwellian. No matter what initial limitations to powers are proposed, those powers will inevitably be expanded and abused. We only have to look to the actions of governments, sadly including our own, revealed in the “Twitter files” for evidence of such abuse. Social media companies were pressured to censor factual information about the COVID-19 virus and the mRNA vaccines. Government suppression of free and open debate during the COVID crisis has resulted in what is arguably the worst medical disaster in human history. Uncensored open debate may well have prevented this disaster.

The unscientific censorship during the COVID crisis has proven that government agencies cannot be trusted to be the arbiter of what is “misinformation” or “disinformation”, let alone “malinformation”.

The proponents of this amendment claim: *“The rapid spread of false, misleading and deceptive information online has resulted in a multitude of harms from disrupted public health responses to foreign interference in elections and the undermining of democratic institutions.”*

But the majority of medical harm was the result of false, misleading and deceptive information from governments, including our own. A clear example: Australian government officials claimed that the mRNA vaccines were safe in pregnancy. But at the time those claims were made, the TGA was in possession of manufacturer's documentation that clearly showed that no reproductive toxicology or pregnancy safety testing had been completed. And election interference? In the US, it was a government agency (FBI) that promoted the “Russian collusion” hoax and suppressed the Hunter Biden laptop story during the 2020 election campaign.

Trust in online information is best earned with uncensored comment and open civil debate. This is not an issue that requires Australian government interference. What is an issue for the Australian government is restoring citizen's trust that has been so dangerously eroded. Granting the ACMA “Ministry of Truth” powers will only further erode public trust. In the interest of public trust in government, this amendment should not be passed.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. K. Hartmann.