
Submission in response:
Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 (Cth)

Email: information.integrity@infrastructure.gov.au

Respectfully submitted by:

Megan Morris

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I consent to this submission being published and made public.

I am married and live with my husband and three children (Two boys aged 12 years and one girl aged 9 years) in the Perth metropolitan region. I am a bookkeeper and work for a small business on a part-time basis. My husband is employed full time.

Our family attend a local Christian Church and have done for many years. I am involved within the Church coordinating and serving as a mentor at a local public primary school.

As an Australian citizen and a Christian, I am very concerned that this Bill is a significant overreach by the government. It is a direct attack on freedom of speech and is not consistent with fundamental freedoms of speech and communication under international human rights instruments such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 19 of 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 seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The government states in the Bill that banning misinformation and disinformation will protect public health and safety. But who decides what is misinformation and disinformation? It seems rather convenient that anything published by the government, or the professional media is exempted from the Bill. How is this not hypocritical? How is this free speech? Giving free reign to the 'professional' media but not to other versions of media? Who decides if what the 'professional' media says is in fact true? The government is giving itself the power to decide what is true or not and silence speech that contradicts their prevailing ideologies and political messaging. This can only be described as state-imposed sanitation of online information.

Neither does the Bill does not provide a sufficient standard of accountability and oversight for the misuse of censorship powers. The reserve powers given to Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) are too much! ACMA are unelected and they will have the power to silence speech in the public square without transparency or accountability.

The provisions that have been included to acknowledge the competing right to freedom of speech are tokenistic and do not satisfy the high bar required in international law for the interference with fundamental rights of freedom of expression.

The penalties intended to be imposed for breaches of this Bill are severe. Digital platforms will be terrified of allowing content that could even possibly be considered 'misinformation or disinformation' and will provide a 'chilling effect' on free speech.

This Bill allows the government to 'control truth' and is so dangerous for a free and democratic society. I believe the best outcome to misinformation and disinformation is free and open debate from a variety of sources (not limited to the government and 'professional' media), where opinions expressed don't just support 'fashionable' opinions of the day.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I trust that you will consider this submission while making decisions about this draft bill.

Yours Faithfully

Megan Morris