

UNOFFICIAL

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 16 August 2023 12:31 PM
To: Minister.Rowland.MO
Subject: Message sent via ministerial website - Federal disinformation bill [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]

Submitted on Wed, 2023-08-16 12:31

Subject
Federal disinformation bill

Message

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts,

I am writing to express my deep anger and outrage regarding the draft bill titled "Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023". As an Australian citizen, I strongly believe that this bill demonstrates a severe lack of respect for the freedom of speech that we, as citizens, hold dear.

One of the most concerning aspects of this bill is the creation of two classes of citizens. The first class comprises politicians, journalists, and members of educational institutions, who will have the power to disseminate information, whether true or false, online. The second class consists of regular citizens who often possess extensive knowledge about various topics, including industry insiders. This distinction undermines the fundamental democratic principle of equal voice and disproportionately harms those regular citizens who have found their platforms on the internet.

Furthermore, the bill will result in digital service providers being excessively restrictive of speech, surpassing even the most stringent regulations currently in place. The widespread application of this code across the entire industry, without any built-in safeguards, will further compound the harmful impact on freedom of speech.

Attempting to accurately judge what is true or untrue is an impossible task. New information is constantly surfacing that challenges previously accepted facts. For instance, consider the list of facts that were once stated by authorities and expert consensus but later turned out to be false, such as the efficacy of masks in protecting against COVID-19, the evidence of human-to-human transmission of the virus, and the transmission-stopping capabilities of the COVID-19 vaccine. All of these examples could potentially be categorized as public health misinformation under this legislation. It is highly likely that an industry or mandatory code established by ACMA would require the removal of content like the ones mentioned above.

To exacerbate the situation, the bill targets not only provably false information but also true information that is deemed "misleading" or "deceptive". Freedom of speech is invaluable as it allows for open and honest discussions without limits. It permits people to be wrong and facilitates debates to uncover the truth and establish common ground.

Those advocating for bills like this often assert that they are championing truth, not censorship. However, even Dr. Nick Coatsworth, who previously served as the Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia, has expressed serious concerns about the scope and implementation of this bill through his personal Twitter account. On June 25th, 2023, following the announcement of the bill, he tweeted:

"Misinformation is an accusation thrown so readily that such legislation would be impossible to implement, and if it was implemented, would inevitably lead to fines being levied on things that are not, or turn out not to be."

If expert consensus is deemed trustworthy, then what does it say about the bill when one of these experts, appointed as a steward of truth in health information, rebukes it so strongly?

In conclusion, I implore you to reconsider and withdraw this bill. It not only infringes upon the freedom of speech of Australian citizens but also risks silencing regular people who have found their voices through the power of the internet. The internet is a democratic invention that has given a voice to the people, and it is essential that any legislation be conscious of its potential harm to open discourse and the search for truth.

Yours sincerely,

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