

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, 17 August 2023 2:38 PM

To: Minister.Rowland.MO

Subject: Message sent via ministerial website - Submission on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]

Submitted on Thu, 2023-08-17 14:37

Subject

Submission on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Message

Stop Aussie Censorship

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

Submission on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to express my deep anger and outrage at the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. As an Australian citizen, I firmly believe that this bill blatantly disregards our freedom of speech and the democratic principles that underpin our society.

The bill creates two distinct classes of citizens - one comprising politicians, journalists, and members of educational institutions, who have the power to spread information, whether it is true or false, online. The second group consists of regular citizens who often possess more knowledge about certain topics than those in the first category. This imbalance of power threatens to undermine the voice of everyday Australians, who have historically relied on the internet as a platform for democratic discourse.

Moreover, the excessive fines outlined in the bill will result in digital services being more restrictive in their speech policies, further limiting the freedom of expression. The code applies across the entire industry with no provisions for flexibility or exceptions. This rigidity and lack of accountability exacerbate the potential harm caused by the bill.

Attempting to discern truth from falsehood is an impossible task, as new information constantly emerges, sometimes contradicting what was once widely accepted. Mistakes and changing circumstances are part of the human experience, and it is not the government's role to define and police what is true or false.

The proposed legislation fails to distinguish between provably false information and truth that may be deemed misleading or deceptive. Freedom of speech is vital as it allows open and honest discussions to take place, even when individuals may be wrong. It is through these discussions that truth can be debated and consensus can be reached.

It is disheartening to see that even experts in the field, such as Dr. Nick Coatsworth, former Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia, have expressed serious concerns about the scope and application of this bill. If even those

considered authorities on the subject matter raise doubts, then it calls into question the credibility and intentions behind the bill.

The involvement of industry bodies, often influenced by major players in their respective fields, raises concerns about potential anti-competitive practices. Large digital services could use industry codes as gatekeeping mechanisms, impeding new competitors and stifling innovation. The free-market competition between platforms to address misinformation has demonstrated its effectiveness, with users naturally gravitating towards platforms that align with their expectations.

Furthermore, the bill's extraterritorial reach is unworkable and disregards the jurisdiction of other countries. It places an unfair burden on foreign digital services, expecting their compliance with Australian law, industry codes, and regulations. This overreach sets a dangerous precedent that could lead to retaliatory actions by other countries, harming Australia's standing in the global internet community.

The bill's infringement on the implied constitutional freedom of political communication is deeply concerning. It curtails legitimate discussion on matters of public interest, which are often highly contested among political parties and interest groups. Any limitation on this freedom undermines the core principles of our democracy.

Labeling certain viewpoints as misinformation and removing them from digital platforms jeopardizes the information accessibility necessary for informed voting decisions. Independent media organizations, journalists, and bloggers will be subjected to complex reporting standards and misinformation reports, potentially ruining their reputations and hindering their ability to contribute to public discourse.

The threat of interference and the potential to incentivize Government-approved journalists and media institutions raises questions of bias and fair representation. This type of control is reminiscent of undemocratic regimes and undermines Australia's commitment to freedom of expression.

As a founding member of the United Nations and a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Australia should uphold the principles enshrined in these documents. Any attempt to categorize fundamental faith worldviews as misinformation is intolerant and incompatible with the values of our diverse society.

In conclusion, the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is deeply flawed and threatens our fundamental rights and democratic principles. I urge the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to reconsider this bill and ensure that freedom of speech is protected and respected for all Australian citizens.

Yours faithfully,

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