

# Proposed combatting misinformation and disinformation bill

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Good Afternoon

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed bill related to combatting misinformation and disinformation. This is an important issue. The internet and social media publish vast amounts of information each day and many people appear to accept this with little challenge. The mechanisms through which search engines provide further information that supports one's perceived point of view accentuates this.

However, I do not support the proposed bill to place further obligations on the media watchdog ACMA. My concerns are of a practical nature and fall into three areas.

1. The amount of new content is so vast that ACMA cannot possibly be across all of it.
2. The risk of "false positives"
3. The potential loss of integrity of ACMA

I appreciate that ACMA is not acting as a censor directly but by pressuring content providers it will force them to err on the side of caution. This has significant potential to stifle the release of information that may be of benefit to the public. Most importantly it will force content providers to make judgements that are not always possible.

The bill relates to misinformation and disinformation that may be "harmful". We have just been through the Covid pandemic where a raft of potentially harmful matters were discussed on social media. One of these was whether vaccines could cause significant harm. It became a hot topic with some claiming they were safe and others highlighting bad reactions, including death.

It is only now that research out of Denmark has identified that a very few batches of vaccine were linked to extremely high numbers of adverse reactions. This work has been published in a peer reviewed paper. My point is that there is no way that ACMA could have taken a reasoned position on this in any discussions with content providers. The "truth" was not readily available at that time.

My second point is the likelihood of false positives. If the Government has tasked ACMA with requiring content providers to strictly monitor misinformation then a topic that goes unchallenged will, in the eyes of some, be deemed to be endorsed by Government. I appreciate that this is false logic but it will happen.

The same impact would occur if ACMA advises that is unable to make judgement on a particular topic.

My third point is that ACMA's reputation will be severely damaged if it follows up on a specific issue and is then shown to be wrong. There is every likelihood that this will happen. Once it does, content providers and the public will challenge any position that ACMA takes.

For these reasons I believe that Government should rethink its approach.

Kind regards

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