

Submission on draft bill for ACMA powers for mis- and disinformation

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To whom it may concern,

In relation to the draft bill being considered by the government for control of online "misinformation" and "disinformation" I would like to provide comments and input for the process.

In short, I denounce the bill and many of the premises behind it, as what I and many believe is the incorrect approach to information which is deemed to be mis-, dis- or mal-information. This bill should be properly debated, with evidence and case studies from internationally as well as local. The general principle which should be considered is that the honest airing of solid and well-backed information will provide more trust and stability in platforms and institutions, and a stronger society. The alternative is the covering-up and demonising of information - which may eventuate to be correct, in part or whole, and to exaggerate problems of corporate capture. The speed of information exchange may be faster than ever, presenting challenges to all, but the wisdom of the crowd, and the ability of good ideas whose time has come, to overcome bad information have often come to pass.

The US enshrines speech in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights in their Constitution: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press". In addition, Australia is a signatory and had a hand in creating the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 including Article 19: "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." (Emphasis added.) (UN, 2023).

I represent myself only, a relatively well-informed private citizen in [REDACTED] with strong passion for the value of truth and for the development of Australia into a fledgling influence on the world stage, an important regional figurehead accommodating many belief structures. Many countries compete for our favour, and this may be used to our benefit, with our neighbors experiencing strong economic growth, while traditional allies further afield such as other members of AUKUS seek geographical assistance in their economic and geopolitical aims. The ability of Australia to house so many diasporas generally successfully can be a case study and a beacon for other countries.

On first pass, any concerned Australian citizen could be in favour of the outline of this bill. The stated aim appears to be sound, to protect people from online information which is considered to be harmful to discourse. We all wish to be informed and not be led astray, as there is pressure to be on the right side of history with issues. However, we need to be able to be ready to adjust our viewpoints depending on new information and data, and lessen the stigma around being incorrect on an issue provided there is honesty about the change. The other key objection to the bill is a long standing objection: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (Wikipedia, 2023) reframed by many including the acclaimed Alan Moore series as "Who watches the watchmen?" Social media is in crisis recently with Twitter (X), Facebook (Meta) and Google (YouTube, Alphabet) all guilty of heavy-handed errors of judgement which are forcing their hand in important court and US FTC matters. Some of the problems which these companies face have been the dictates provided by unelected agencies and elected governments. I provide detail on these cautionary examples below.

The key benefit of free speech is that ideas may be debated until the best ideas, with the most support and best arguments, will rise up. Strong denouncing of incorrect information with data and proof is required, and will filter quickly through to people. Suppressing information and categorising mis-, dis-, or the newer term mal-information is a fraught business and one that has become a moving target, since there will always exist new ways of sharing information. This exposes ACMA and the Government to potentially be suppressing correct and helpful information, depending on the timeframe and the prevailing belief.

An example - in fact many examples - can be found with the recent Covid-19 pandemic, where we still do not collectively have complete information about the origins of the pandemic, due in part to now exposed illegitimate science from the Proximal Origins paper (The Intercept, 2023). This has meant that the mantra of Follow the Science fell prey to the Watchmen problem when key journal Nature published a bogus paper diverting the focus from lab-leak, which could have directed humans to find treatments and culprits far sooner. The scientists involved have had Slack messages and email correspondence released, indicating their rapid 180 degree change of mind, and we should loudly seek redress and their firings, for the time lost in combating this disease. Australia's Prime Minister at the time, Scott Morrison, famously denounced China for full culpability (ABC, 2021) which scapegoated a regional ally and impacted trade massively for Australians.

Another issue at present relates to the truth (or even open discussion) about stubbornly high excess death rates in Australia and New Zealand of over 10-15% (ABS, 2023; Our World In Data, 2023), despite post-Omicron

Covid not being responsible for anywhere near enough to impact current numbers. Although there are myriad factors responsible for this rise, some do not seem to be able to be raised, meanwhile we are losing Australians at high rates, and not in the higher-age groups most at risk from Covid.

While the draft bill states the danger exemplified by the damage inflicted on 5G towers due to some fairly extreme activity fueled by online discussion and information, this contentious issue could be a case in point of how to combat the problem. If the best scientists would perform proper studies to show the amount of harm, if any, from 5G towers, and present risks to users, this will vindicate or otherwise, the concerns. If the government and the ACMA have no doubts about this issue, they should come strongly out on their front foot to let science quieten doubters. Unless there is in fact something to the issue, which there is certainly some evidence to suggest (Oncology Letters, 2020), in which case the government has a responsibility to protect citizens and not expose themselves and carriers to costly litigation. In fact, the study which has assessed the data for potential human harms from 5G is from Nature (Karipidis et al, 2021) and assessed 107 scientific studies on many potential mechanisms of harm, and found there was no data yet showing cause for alarm. However, only those who continued to read into the paper would find that in fact, only one of the studies had a high degree of scientific legitimacy and the paper exhorted that "given the low-quality methods of the majority of the experimental studies we infer that a systematic review of different bioeffects is not possible at present." So it is up to the government to allay fears fully or to wear the consequences both in media and in potential liability. Denying discussion on social media is like futile and expensive whack-a-mole until fears can be allayed, and further erodes trust in institutions.

The ACMA has notably been a stalwart in working to protect consumers in Australia, looking to remove highly offensive material and content such as spam. This has been mostly successful, however we have seen that over the years the organisation has also enforced lists of undesirable, blocked websites, with little mechanism for redress or explanation. While I am of the same mind that live-streaming of horrific events such as Christchurch should indeed be removed, this bill outlines significant overreach. We know thanks to releases by Edward Snowden and other concerned whistleblowers since, including Democratic senators recently (Politico, 2022), that the US leads the charge with its agenda to increase spying, despite (treasonous?) denials of domestic spying in Congress by CIA leaders. Is this the path we wish to take Australia, down one where the placability of Australians is taken advantage of to advance another country's agenda, at the expense of sovereignty and the independence which our young nation deserves?

In fact, agencies themselves have caused myriad problems, not least when 51 current and former intelligence chiefs lied in a public letter about the Hunter Biden laptop being "Russian disinfo" prior to the 2020 US election. They now face naming and shaming and they discredit their organisations, for very tawdry subject matter which implicates a president's family which absolutely deserved attention. The organisation formerly known as Twitter has been subject to house-cleaning recently, led by independent journalists such as Matt Taibbi, winner of many independent journalism awards, and this has shown the risks of the coercion of social media at the behest of government, who may in fact be captured by private corporations or entities, such as think tanks (Taibbi et al, 2023).

Why should we trust the new bill, which appears to be local implementation of the Censorship Industrial Complex, since previous examples exist of problematic activities, furthering anti-democratic interests, and forcing Australian officials and representatives of companies to have to cow-tow to powerful interests rather than Australian people? We know for example that in the years during the Covid pandemic, Twitter received 4,213 requests from the Department for Home Affairs to censor content, including jokes and content which turned out to be true (The Australian, 2023). Andrew Lowenthal has reported on FOI requests showing that a Senior Analyst from the "Extremism Insights and Communication" (sic!) branch of the Social Cohesion Division of the Dept of Home Affairs had sent emails to Twitter to take down content; where the Watchmen cannot even spellcheck, how can we trust them to fact check accurately? (Lowenthal, Racket, 2023). One single example of an account on Facebook removed, had twenty followers and questioned the heavy-handed but inconsistent mask policies in Victoria with a visual provocation. As we now know from the gold-standard in evidence, Cochrane Report into masking, "the pooled results of RCTs [randomized control trials] did not show a clear reduction in respiratory viral infection with the use of medical/surgical masks." (Cochrane, 2023.)

The approach to therapeutics in the Pacific region was markedly different, with Australia near to Japan whose Nobel Prize winning WHO Essential Medicine was shown to have anti-viral effects in an Australian lab in-vitro early during the pandemic (Monash, 2020). However, Australia followed a different and rather extreme propagandistic line in this research, costing potential lives as we outlawed the drug (Ivermectin) totally. This is unheard of, and personally I had been told by my GP that she had the drug ready for her family at home, and could easily supply me with some as a prophylactic against SARS-CoV-2, until the following week when the TGA had slapped a ban on the drug. How many Australians could have avoided clogging hospital beds if we had been honest about the discussion instead of (likely) caving in to efforts by providers of expensive Emergency Use Authorised drugs with novel and incompletely tested delivery gene therapy platforms.

All these episodes illustrate the difficulty of the path proposed by the Government and ACMA, and many have cost lives and livelihoods, for the sake of controlling narratives which are often shown to be false or exaggerated. The US attempted similar, through their Disinformation Governance Board, headed by the inexplicably weird Nina Jankowicz, and failed within three weeks. Embarrassment need not be our path to combating online information considered difficult. Rather, seek experts, hear both sides of an argument, acknowledge risks, and you will find that the citizens of this country respond as they see the Government has their best interests at heart. The only other pathway is to reduce social and traditional media ownership concentration, the former currently well underway with the US's Federal Trade Commission going after Google successfully.

With important issues arising such as the winding down of the Ukraine conflict but ramping up of African tensions, US hawkish pressure on China ostensibly around Taiwan, the emergence of reporting and whistleblower testimony on extraterrestrial and novel human craft, the emerging Biden and Trump scandals, the US election in 2024, no doubt there are myriad issues which Australians have cause to question and need to explore. However, information wishes to be free, and the letter by many former Australian Attorneys-General to call for Julian Assange's release illustrates that there is an old-school mentality towards honesty and respect of reporting the truth. If we wish a healthy media landscape, social landscape, and indeed government, we need to pause and rethink this bill.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to respond.

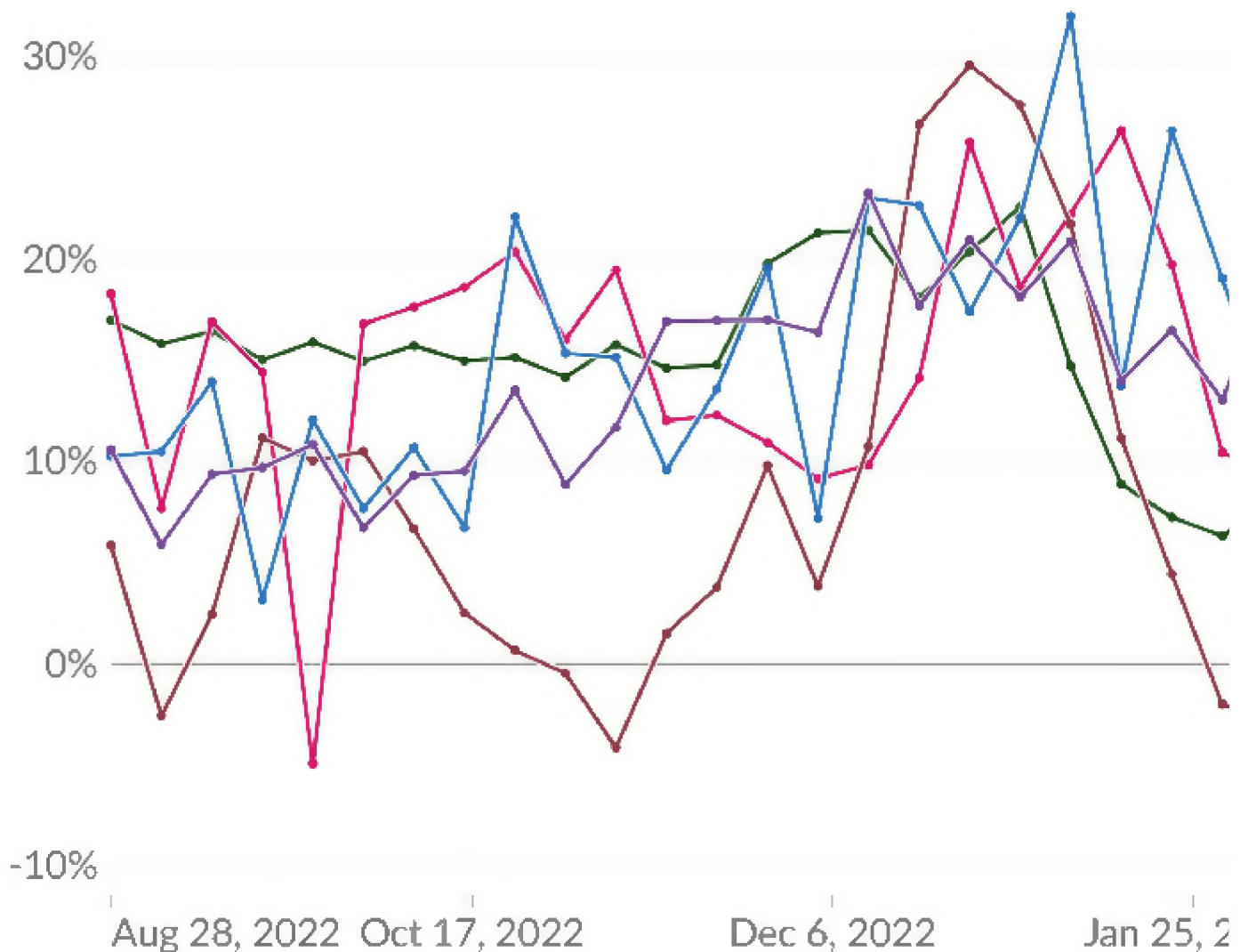
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Excess mortality: Deaths from all causes compared to

The percentage difference between the reported number of weekly or monthly de deaths in the same period over the years 2015–2019. The reported number might incomplete coverage and delays in reporting.

[+ Add country or region](#)

All together ▼



Source: Human Mortality Database (2023); World Mortality Dataset (2023)

Note: Comparisons across countries are affected by differences in the completeness of death

▶ Jan 5, 2020

CHART

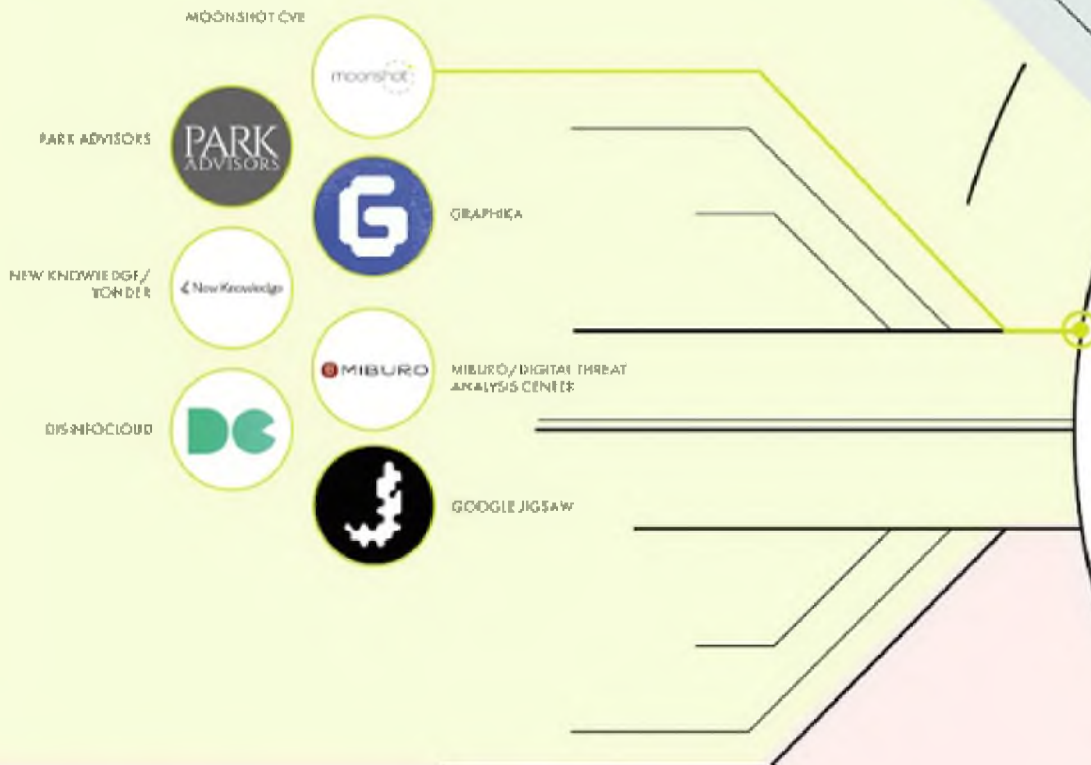
MAP

TABLE

GOVERNMENT



FOR PROFIT



ACADEMIC INITIATIVES



INTEGRITY
INITIATIVE



ASPEN INSTITUTE



ATLANTIC
COUNCIL

Sincerely,

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Secondary Physics, Science and Mathematics Teacher,
former Telecommunications Professional

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