

Re: Submission regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

From: Dionysia McPherson [REDACTED]
To: Information Integrity <information.integrity@infrastructure.gov.au>
Date: Sun, 20 Aug 2023 22:04:40 +1000

Just confirming that this is an official submission which may be published.

On Sun, Aug 20, 2023 at 10:01PM Dionysia McPherson [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear Director of The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts,

I'm writing to voice my concern over the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

This bill must not go ahead, and is at its core undemocratic. There are a number of significant issues with the proposed legislation, but ultimately this is a bill that assumes that the Australian people are not capable of using their own minds to determine truth.

Freedom of speech is not only a fundamental human right, it affords Australians the ability to practice critical thinking, debate about issues openly, and come to their own conclusions. An argument that because some people come to the wrong conclusion and act out in extreme ways (such as drinking bleach), the government therefore should police all information, is seriously flawed. Controlling information will not solve this issue, and will have a detrimental impact on our citizens learning what it means to engage with content, discuss it openly, and think for themselves.

More specifically, this censorship is concerning because:

1. It blames the informer for the behaviour of the recipient by claiming that 'misinformation'/'disinformation' can cause people to do inappropriate things.
2. It can be used to censor any information on any issue that any government does not approve now and in the future.
3. It puts the development of a code of practice in the hands of the industry, leaving the general public out of the loop.
4. No one government or agency has a monopoly on truth. Our perception of truth evolves over time with experience. It will silence dissenting experts.

It also raises some serious questions, which I'm extremely concerned aren't already addressed in the bill:

1. Who decides what constitutes 'misinformation'/'disinformation'? (Their qualifications, experience, ties with industry)
2. To whom and what products will it apply? (unhealthy foods/cosmetics?)
3. How (by what process) will the government determine what constitutes 'misinformation'/'disinformation'?
4. How will it monitor the developments in that area to update its understanding of information/disinformation in the future?
5. How will the government communicate to all Australians (of all ages, ethnicities, education levels and abilities) what they can and can't say in the future?

Thank you for this opportunity to submit on this matter - I urge you to consider how problematic and concerning this bill is and to reject it entirely.

Best wishes,

Dionysia McPherson
[REDACTED]