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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Exposure draft of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

I make this submission as a concerned Australian citizen. A citizen extremely concerned at the freedoms being taken away by government, and what is proposed in the above Exposure Draft Bill.

My submission can be placed in the public domain.

What is ‘misinformation’? What is ‘disinformation’? Both are relative terms; and will be determined by governments, government departments and bureaucrats. They are subjective, and not good legislation.

My main concern with this Exposure Draft Bill is that governments, government departments and bureaucrats are exempt from the proposed legislation.

That governments, government departments and bureaucrats are exempt in this Exposure Draft Bill is completely unacceptable. This reeks of totalitarianism—government not only controlling what its citizens say, but also preventing its citizens from speaking. How dare this even be considered!

Governments are not always right. Government departments are not always right. Bureaucrats are not always right. Quite simply, governments, government departments and bureaucrats are human. Human beings are flawed creatures who are inherently incapable of being 100% right all the time.

In my experience, governments, government departments and bureaucrats are far removed from those who are affected by any legislation. These groups have little practical understanding of an issue, mostly relying on biased advice from interest groups who may or may not fully grasp the nuances involved.

Should this flawed Exposure Draft Bill be passed, what accountability is there for governments, government departments and bureaucrats?

Australia is a democracy. The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade states the core defining values of Australian Democracy are:

- freedom of election and being elected.
- freedom of assembly and political participation.
- freedom of speech, expression and religious belief.
- rule of law.
- other basic human rights.

Clearly this Exposure Draft Bill seeks to undermine the above core values of Australian Democracy.

To me, Freedom of speech means I have the right to hold and share my opinion about an issue; and I also believe others have the right to hold and share their opinion about the same issue. Either side may change their opinion with robust (and respectful) debate.

Professor Noam Chomsky puts it well: *“If you believe in freedom of speech, you believe in freedom of speech for views you don’t like. Goebbels was in favour of freedom of speech for views he liked. So was Stalin. If you’re in*

favour of freedom of speech, that means you're in favour of freedom of speech precisely for views you despise. Otherwise, you're not in favour of freedom of speech."

From the above quote, I infer that the government does not believe in freedom of speech, because they want to introduce legislation to shut down anyone who holds opposing views. Exempting themselves and their associates demonstrates contempt for their constituents; clear overreach; a gross lack of integrity; and no transparency or accountability to those (us taxpayers) who pay their wages.

I do not see in my reading of the Exposure Draft Bill where there are mechanisms to protect valid expressions of opinion and belief or to ensure that there are clear and defined limits on suppression of speech.

This Exposure Draft Bill is inconsistent with fundamental freedoms and speech and communication under international human rights instruments like the UN declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

This Exposure Draft Bill puts too much power in the hands of unelected bureaucrats to silence speech.

There is insufficient standard of accountability and oversight for misuse of censorship powers. Why would this be?

This Exposure Draft Bill does not indicate it requires mechanisms to hold digital service providers liable for excessive and onerous policing of legitimate speech.

My experience with "fact checkers" of digital service providers is that they are not objective or independent. They "fact check" according to their employers' political bias, or what governments require.

This has been seen specifically since Covid-19 began. Those who questioned Covid-19 mandates were shut down by "Big Tech". It is now blindingly obvious that being "vaccinated" does not stop one from getting Covid or transmitting it. But governments—both state and federal—continue to say people need to keep being "vaccinated". Those who revealed vax injuries on social media were shut down.

If these issues were truly "fact checked", there may have been a different outcome. Knowing the documented truth that the "vaccine" does not do what its propaganda says, why—for example—are "vaccine" mandates still in place in most states? It's difficult to describe in a few words the lack of integrity, transparency and accountability by government, government departments and bureaucrats over the last few years in this area.

In closing, I strongly believe this Exposure Draft Bill is not in the best interests of Australia and its citizens. It should have never been raised and should be dumped into the deepest sea immediately!

George R. R. Martin wisely said, *'When you tear out a man's tongue, you are not proving him a liar, you're only telling the world that you fear what he might say.'*

If the Australian government (along with ACMA) is trying to gag its citizens by stamping out any opposing views, then we must beware!

Australia does not need any further erosion of our democracy.

Yours sincerely



M Annette Lawson
Worried Citizen