

Australian Government

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

Consultation on New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation

Via email: [Information.Integrity@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:Information.Integrity@infrastructure.gov.au)

August 2023

### **Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance submission to the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 - Exposure Draft**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. The consultation on the proposed ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation provides the opportunity to highlight the importance of **media literacy** in preparing people to interact with information and people online.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) has prepared this submission to outline the relevant components of the **Australian Digital Capability Framework**,<sup>1</sup> and our joint program of work with the Future Skills Organisation to progress digital capability in Australia.

Uplifting digital capability for all Australians will have the associated impact of increasing a person's media literacy, digital resilience and digital citizenship; all of which play an important role in a person's capacity to participate in an online world, and critically assess the information with which they engage.

We do not provide commentary on any other aspect of the Exposure Draft.

According to the latest Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 9.4% of the national population remains highly digitally excluded, and an additional 14.2% are digitally excluded. Taken together, almost one quarter of Australians remain digitally excluded (23.6%),<sup>2</sup> and while digital inclusion at the national level continues to steadily improve, progress on **digital ability** is close to stalling. The national Digital Ability score has increased marginally from 64.4 points in 2021 to 64.9 in 2023, however some groups saw declines in Digital Ability scores over the past three years, including people in the lowest income quintile and Australians aged over 75.

The ADIA, in partnership with the FSO, the Finance, Technology and Business Jobs and Skills Council (formerly the Digital Skills Organisation (DSO)), is working on a two-pronged approach to improve digital capability across Australia:

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2022), Australian Digital Capability Framework.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Holcombe-James, I., Ormond-Parker, L., & Ganley, L. (2023), Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2023. Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra.

- Adopting the Australian Digital Capability Framework (ADCF), extended to cover pre-levels 1A and 1B as articulated in the Digital Literacy Skills Framework, as Australia’s national common language around what it means to be digitally capable.
- Endorsement of an agreed national benchmark for digital capability for access to work, learning and life, as developed by the ADIA and FSO in consultation with stakeholders, and anchored in the ADCF.

At present there is no common language in Australia that describes digital capability. The terms ‘digital literacy’, ‘digital fluency’, ‘digital ability’, ‘digital skills’ and ‘digital competency’ mean different things to different people and in different sectors, as Australia has no alignment to a particular definition used by all Australian individuals, community organisations, private sector organisations and government at all levels. This is problematic right across the economy and across society, including for those working in the community to support individuals to gain their first digital abilities, retrain, upskill, gain employment, and help address disadvantage.

Importantly in the context of this consultation, we note that a person’s level of digital ability is linked to their capacity to engage in all aspects of online content, including the contemporary delivery of news media via social media and other online platforms. When it comes to combatting misinformation and disinformation, three of five Focus Areas within the ADCF provide for media literacy:

- Focus 1 - Information and Data Literacy
  - 1.1 Search, browse, and filter information
  - 1.2 Verify information and data
- Focus 2 - Communication and Collaboration
  - 2.5 Digital conduct
- Focus 3 - Digital Content Creation
  - 3.3 Digital copyright and licences

Aligning to a single description, the (extended) ADCF, creates the necessary conditions to help align the myriad efforts currently underway to lift digital capability at varying levels – including government-led, in the community sector, and industry-led initiatives – to at least an agreed national benchmark, anchored in the (extended) ADCF, with both endorsed by all Australian governments.<sup>3</sup>

Building on the ADCF, the FSO – in partnership with the ADIA – has developed the Digital Capability Benchmark which articulates the minimum level of capability within the ADCF as the capability that all Australians must be supported to achieve in order to access the opportunities associated with modern work, learning and life. The Benchmark will be impactful across the economy and society as a tool to both map against and aim toward.

Combined, and when implemented across the economy and society, the ADCF and the Benchmark have the capacity to contribute to a marked improvement in media literacy in Australia.

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<sup>3</sup>Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2020, *A National Digital Inclusion Roadmap*

Yours faithfully,



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CEO, Infoxchange  
Chair, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance



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### **About the ADIA**

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) is a shared initiative with over 500 business, government, academic and community organisations working together to accelerate action on digital inclusion. Our member organisations conduct a variety of research and practical programs aimed at reducing the digital divide and enabling greater social and economic participation for all Australians. The ADIA is supported by Infoxchange, Google and Telstra. Australia Post was also a founding partner.

The ADIA's vision is to build a digitally inclusive Australia where everyone is equipped to fully participate in the economy and society. Being digitally included means a person has:

- Affordable access to quality internet and appropriate devices.
- Access to inclusively designed online content, that's readable and accessible, including if they are differently abled or from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- The knowledge, ability, skills and confidence to complete tasks safely and securely online.

Visit: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org.au/>

### **About the FSO**

The Future Skills Organisation is a Jobs and Skills Council funded by the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. The FSO's mission is: Through close collaboration with industry and other stakeholders, we work collectively to grow Australia's pool of finance, technology, and business talent to benefit all industries.

Visit: [www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au](http://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au)