

Dear Sir/ Madam

Re: the Government's proposed *Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023* (Cth).

I enjoy being a citizen of a democratic country like Australia. My parents and my husband are all migrants, and we often discuss the differences in matters like freedom of speech between Australia and other nations. So, it is somewhat alarming to read that the Government is planning to bring in a law that will be an attack on freedom of speech in our beautiful nation. What is the Government thinking to propose and even consider such a law. It is totally inconsistent with Australia's international human rights obligations and is out of step with equivalent European laws. From my reading about the Bill, it will enable government bureaucrats and big tech to silence and censor speech that goes far beyond reasonable limitation.

I am particularly concerned the Bill will give government the power to silence religious and political speech that contradicts prevailing ideologies and political messaging. This is especially relevant in the current climate of woke ideologies and numerous un-scientific theories that abound regarding such issues as gender fluidity and critical race theory, and even current topics of discussion such as the upcoming Voice referendum. The Bill fails to include mechanisms to protect valid expression of opinion and belief or to ensure that there are clear and defined limits on suppression of speech. Australian citizens should always have the freedom to express their opinions and beliefs, as we always have and for which our soldiers have valiantly fought over past years.

The Bill is a significant overreach by the government and is inconsistent with fundamental freedoms of speech and communication under international human rights instruments like the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Such proposed law puts too much power in the hands of unelected bureaucrats to silence speech in the public square without transparency or accountability. The definitions that the Bill includes about "harm" is vague and ideological and it is troubling that the definition risks it being weaponised to shut down legitimate speech on pressing social issues.

I can see that the Bill gives ACMA excessive powers to compel owners and private users of digital platforms to provide information and evidence about misinformation and disinformation that is a worrying breach of privacy. Moreover, the severity of the penalties for failing to comply with the misinformation codes and standards and for failing to provide evidence requested by ACMA is excessive and will provide a 'chilling effect' on free speech.

Finally, the Bill does not provide a sufficient standard of accountability and oversight for misuse of censorship powers, while the few provisions that have been included to acknowledge the competing right to freedom of expression are tokenistic and do not satisfy the high bar required in international law for the interference with fundamental rights of freedom of expression.

The Bill is a real threat to our freedoms of speech. It will impact very negatively on our rights as citizens. Please reject this Bill outright.

Yours sincerely,

Joyce Michael (BA, Dip.Ed.)

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Contact: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]