

Dear Sir / Madam,

I, Bruce Vandeppeer, of [REDACTED] present the following submission regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

There are the well-known maxims: 'lead by example' and 'hold the leaders to a higher standard' which clearly this Bill has considered current leaders to be above those very important standards for any and every civilised society.

Submission discussion

Firstly, I wish to express my total shock, that in 2023 in Australia there is even a need to be presenting a submission in relation to this matter; any person even with a modicum of understanding of history should consider the amendment to the bill is steeped in history and absolutely none of it positive. I would trust that the authors of this amendment would be aware of George Santayana's famous quote '*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*'¹ Actually check and read the footnote it will be enlightening but really shouldn't be if you are serious in your considerations.

Look at regimes who decided that they had all truth; just two will do the German Democracy in the 1930's till 1945 and what was the result, many of those who 'held and enforced the truth' either suicided or were tried and imprisoned or executed. Take a second more recent case New Zealand PM Jacinta Ardern stated that the NZ govt was the 'sole source of truth', she has gone but did better than the Germans she is now on the international stage. Spend a couple of minutes to see how much she got wrong but under this legislation she would have been exempt anyway, because she was a leader.

The ramifications of this bill can be easily researched and can I suggest identifying sound historical precedent in a democracy, then look no further than the book *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* by Eric Metaxas and *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* by Christopher Browning. [yes I have read them both and have the books] Due diligence is important when introducing legislation and looking at history in a Democracy these would be a good place to start, before going on to other tyrannical regimes of varying ideologies.

Using your very informative and absolutely frightening Fact sheet I will give just one example [and there are so many on various topics] of what should be dealt with in accordance with your key points - albeit you have excluded this from the Act where it applies to the Government.

¹ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: The phases of Human Progress* (1905-1906) at Project Gutenberg Vol. I, Reason in Common Sense

- Happiness: is the only sanction of life; where happiness fails, existence remains a mad and lamentable experiment.
- Fanaticism: consists in redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.
- Progress: **Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.**

Example

On 21 Feb 21, the then Federal Minister for Health; The Hon Greg Hunt stated inter alia the following:

“Well, our first goal is protection. And what we see is with both the two initial vaccines, the Pfizer and the AstraZeneca vaccine, the international evidence is that the safety impact for prevention of serious illness, hospitalisation, death has been determined to be up to 100 per cent.”

“I would like every Australian to take this up, other than those with a medical reason which would prevent them, but we recognise that being voluntary is the best way to do that.”

[Interview with David Speers on ABC Insiders on the COVID-19 vaccine rollout | Health and Aged Care Portfolio Ministers](#) Accessed 18 Jul 23

Four very relevant dot points follow from Key points at this link:

<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/communications-legislation-amendment-combatting-misinformation-and-disinformation-bill-2023-factsheet-june2023.pdf>
Accessed 18 Jul 23

- Misinformation and disinformation pose a threat to the safety and wellbeing of Australians, as well as our democracy, society and economy.

The Bill defines misinformation and disinformation as follows:

1. Misinformation is online content that is false, misleading or deceptive, that is shared or created without an intent to deceive but can cause and contribute to serious harm.
2. Disinformation is misinformation that is intentionally disseminated with the intent to deceive or cause serious harm.
3. Serious harm is harm that affects a significant portion of the Australian population, economy or environment, or undermines the integrity of an Australian democratic process.

As a result of the Federal Health Minister’s actions (highlighted first statement from the first link above) the current Government set aside \$76.9 million of taxpayers’ (not his) money to compensate the injured from vaccines for a period of less than a year (more to come?). The minister statement therefore clearly fits into ➤ dot point above as it provided a threat to ‘safety and wellbeing of Australians, as well as our....society and economy.’

The Ministers information was on line – ABC and was clearly ‘false, misleadingand contribute[d] to serious harm’ as per dot point 1 above and therefore was misinformation.

The Minister’s department ran an advertising campaign highlighting what he had said regarding the performance of the vaccines. One of the two vaccines was withdrawn so therefore was disinformation that was intentionally disseminated as per dot point 2.

The Minister's actions caused serious harm affecting a significant portion of the population ie those with serious vaccine injuries and death plus collateral issues to family et al. Compare this to any other vaccine albeit it clearly was not what the Macquarie dictionary identifies as a vaccine, he simply called it that. The Minister also stated that the vaccine would be voluntary and that also was untrue and because it was mandated that 'undermined the integrity of an Australian Democratic process' as per dot point 3.

The most disturbing thing is that because of his position none of this Bill would apply to him. I think the expression is 'rules for thee and rules for me' hardly democratic in any sense.

Brief comment on issues

Implementing this amendment would; by definition, implication and history, identify those proposing and voting for this to be anti-democratic and a disgrace to this nation.

There are simply so many issues. Who will decide what is truth? These people must be subject to the same rules as the people being charged for misinformation and disinformation, otherwise justice is not blind. We know that Government, Scientists and the Media have appalling track records on establishing truth, so who are going to be the arbiters of truth? We know also that Fact Checkers have failed miserably in spite of financial benefits to them.

If the Politicians represent the people and bureaucrats are known as public servants how on earth can this amendment be consistent with those two groups fulfilling their roles. So just to clear up the obvious, electors vote to elect people to represent them because you can't have a free for all, but it is in the Constitution. Public servants are there to serve the public I have had disagreements over that and yet most simply need to check their 'codes of conduct' and certainly the ones I have dealt with are pretty clear.

My Father, long since passed on, would say to me in my youth when heading out of Ararat towards Melbourne; study hard and be smart but never lose common sense otherwise you will end up in that house on the hill, up there on the left, perhaps it needs to be reopened.

Solution

So, I have a solution to help save our democracy, as previously stated, our politicians are supposed to be the representatives of the people. Instead of the current procedure so that the concept of leading by example and holding the leaders to a higher standard are both held up, I propose that you implement the legislation but for an initial period of five years whilst only have it applying to Politicians, Bureaucrats, Main Stream Media and Scientists with all the proposed penalties enforced and then, and only after that, decide by referendum whether or not to go ahead with the Amendment.

Yours Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Bruce F Vandeeper.

Bruce F Vandeeper
20 July 2023