

Re – The New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation...

I wish to state most emphatically that I totally disagree with this Proposed Bill for the below reasons.

This Bill in my opinion, is in its very essence, anti –democratic. True, Australia does not have a Bill of Rights (more's the pity and more and more appears to be the need), however I would argue that Freedom of Speech must be a given in a democratic country such as ours. Such silencing would only have a devastatingly negative effect on important debates. For example, media companies and internet platforms would predictably become very edgy about the threat of fines and having to defend themselves and this would add further to excessive censorship this Bill would create.

This proposed Bill is both poorly drafted and framed using ambiguous terms such as “serious harm” (whatever that may mean to whomever is censoring our speech and opinions) and the lack of proper definition of what counts as misinformation and disinformation is nothing less than intentional obfuscation.

The proposed Bill is far too open to interpretation and potentially targets all public dialogue that Governments and Bureaucracies don't like, everything from blogs, podcasts Twitter posts for example, whilst State and Federal governments (possibly even Local Government) would remain free of scrutiny and censorship. This essentially means that governments can more freely tell lies and spread misinformation framed as truth. However, anyone in the public could be prevented from exposing such lies and corruption. This can only be viewed as a sick joke and is patently unhealthy as far as honest government goes. This is the sort of control and manipulation we would expect from some tin-pot Third World Country following a coup. Governments far too readily forget that they are there for us, elected by us. We are not here for the government's convenience and to be shut down when the truth becomes uncomfortable.

This proposed Bill is Orwellian and tyrannical and an obscenity in a supposed democratic country. If it was to defy all reason and logic and become reality (and I absolutely urge you not to proceed with this), a reasonable question to ask is...”Will a public apology, redress and compensation be paid to all those who have been proven to have been wrongly censored or accused of spreading misinformation?”

We must allow truth to prevail because “The Truth” can and does change radically over time through the open debate and testing of ideas. Even if the Bill (initially) does not intend to apply individual penalties, the effect will nonetheless be the suppression of speech and groups with a tandem outcome of forcing them to go underground. It is a far healthier society that can discuss anything, express whatever opinions it needs to so that everyone knows what their neighbour and society generally is thinking and doing.

We all know that media platforms of all formats are guilty of both misinformation and disinformation, just as are all levels of government. We also know that the only way to combat this is to publicly expose the lies or inaccuracies, not censor them because limiting speech is far more dangerous to society than the potential consequences of false claims.

Regulating truth on social media will not protect democracy, it will only suppress it.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Australia helped to draft in 1948 states ... “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Yours Sincerely,

Leigh Murrell

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