

Dear Misinformation Bill Review,

I am GREATLY CONCERNED by the draft Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 and its potential SERIOUS negative impact on free speech in Australia.

The necessity of this legislation is certainly questionable, as speech crimes such as defamation and inciting violence are ALREADY OUTLAWED.

The startling difference between this bill and these existing laws is that THIS NEW BILL COULD effectively be used to SHUT DOWN ALL KINDS OF LAWFUL DISCUSSIONS about a wide range of social issues. Some examples include discussions regarding biological men being able to identify as female and enter women's private spaces; global warming; the safety of vaccines; curricula for primary schools, etc.

This bill's primary purpose seems to me to be the deliberate outlawing and eradication of political beliefs deemed contrary to the politically accepted mainstream. This could in effect GAG UNWANTED OPINIONS even if they are factual and truthful.

This bill has also unsurprisingly chosen the most effective form of censorship – threatening private companies with massive fines if they are caught allowing so-called “mis/disinformation” on their platforms.

Such threats of large fines will result in much more censorship than if this bill simply sought to prosecute individuals. Pressuring private corporations to readily cancel people's accounts to avoid attracting censorship fines, is also much safer for the government, compared with confronting individuals and risking being called out for governmental overreach.

The definitions contained in this draft bill are also outrageously vague and subjective. This bill loosely defines harm as hate speech, disruption of public order, harm to government, harm to public health, the environment, and economy (p.10). THIS IS A BROADER ATTACK ON FREE SPEECH than anything previously seen in Australia – including not just harm to people but “to the Australian environment” as well!

Another concerning part of this definition of harm is the word “disruption”, which could easily be weaponised to prevent legitimate robust debate or to censor any political views which are opposed to ruling orthodoxy.

I think it is naive to hope that this bill will be used only for good, honesty and integrity, as it can so easily be used for UNJUST CENSORSHIP. Anyone who has studied history would know that we can never afford to put our trust in the supposed inherent good of any leadership group when there are NO PROPER OBJECTIVE SAFEGUARDS in place to restrain power overreach.

Thank you for considering my submission.

I hope you will be convinced that freedom of speech and the open exchange of ideas are non-negotiable, AND MUST NOT BE COMPROMISED BY THIS UNWARRANTED BILL.

Yours faithfully,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.