

Dear Misinformation Bill Review,

I wish to make a submission about the draft Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

Western Democracies were once the stand-out example of freedom of the individual. While welcoming free speech there were boundaries to protect anyone who might be subjected to slander and the Courts protected any such victim by enforcing libel laws. This sensible protection provided a satisfactory level of comfort or ease among the community without draconian rules of the kind envisaged in the proposed Bill for "Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation".

The proposal is 'Un-Australian' and would be very 'at-home' in the former Soviet Union, Red China or North Korea. It is not fit for inclusion in our system.

This bill tramples on freedom of speech by compelling big tech to silence discussion which even unintentionally causes harm to such a broad range of targets that almost anything can be construed as such. This bill defines no clear standard, but instead relies upon online platforms to play it as safe-as-possible to remove whatever could be potentially be labelled mis/disinformation before they get fined for not doing so.

But even a cursory look at history reveals that many ideas which were unpopular, controversial, or even universally condemned later turned out to be true! Humanity has not become infallible since then and people still make mistakes. Just recently, for example, during the pandemic, there are many instances of so-called facts which even governmental departments were later forced to back-track on.

It should be clear that this bill is lacking sufficient clarity and accountability as well as safeguards against the misuse of censorship powers. Moreover, the exclusion of government-authorized content from this censorship regime is hypocritical and inconsistent and will establish one standard for government and another standard for ordinary Australians in terms of what each can say.

I therefore encourage the Department to instead explore alternative approaches which focus on empowering individuals with critical thinking skills. Education and awareness campaigns not heavy-handed regulation which infringes upon fundamental freedoms should be favoured if we wish to preserve any semblance of democracy.

Yours sincerely,

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