

Dear Misinformation Bill Review,

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

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.

This bill is lacking in clarity, 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. It establishes one standard for government and another for ordinary Australians in terms of what one can say. There is an obvious question here - why?

I therefore encourage the Department to explore alternative approaches which focus on empowering individuals with critical thinking skills and presenting all angles of discussion so that people can make an informed choice. Education and awareness campaigns are preferable to heavy-handed regulation which infringe upon fundamental freedoms. This Bill needs to focus on other alternatives if we are to preserve any semblance of democracy - a democracy which is surreptitiously being dissolved.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.