

Dear Minister Rowland,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the potential expansion of internet censorship under the review of the Online Safety Act 2021. While I recognize the importance of safeguarding Australians from online harms, such as hate speech and image-based abuse, it is crucial to balance these protections with the fundamental right to free speech and the flow of information.

The principle of free speech is not merely a democratic right but a foundational element in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. History has demonstrated time and again that censorship, in any form, can obscure truth and hinder societal progress. The very essence of scientific inquiry and philosophical debate relies on the unencumbered exchange of ideas, some of which may be controversial or unpopular.

Regarding the statutory review initiated on 22 November 2023 and led by Ms. Delia Rickard PSM, there are significant concerns about the broad powers currently granted to the eSafety Commissioner and the potential for these powers to expand. The Online Safety Act's intent to safeguard individuals, especially children, from online harm is commendable. However, the expansion of these powers needs careful scrutiny to prevent overreach.

The potential introduction of duties of care imposed on platforms to regulate content can lead to excessive caution by these platforms, erring on the side of removing content to avoid penalties rather than promoting a free exchange of ideas. This could stifle innovation and restrict access to beneficial technologies and information, particularly in areas like generative artificial intelligence and algorithmic advancements.

Additionally, the focus on international developments and regulatory frameworks must consider that the strongest models of online governance support openness and free expression while targeting specific, clearly defined illegal activities. Broad and vague regulations risk creating a chilled environment where censorship becomes a tool for harm rather than protection.

As Australia continues to develop its regulatory approach to online services and technology, it is vital to engage in a dialogue that includes diverse perspectives, ensuring that regulations do not become a hindrance to the very freedoms they aim to protect. The balance between safety and freedom must be carefully managed to foster an environment where innovation and free expression drive societal advancement.

In conclusion, while the objectives of the Online Safety Act are supported in their aim to protect individuals from specific and serious online harms, it is imperative that any amendments or expansions of the Act carefully consider the potential consequences on free speech and innovation. I urge you to consider these perspectives as part of the

review process and to ensure that any regulatory changes enhance, rather than inhibit, our society's ability to freely access and share information.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to seeing how the review progresses and how it incorporates the views of a broad range of stakeholders in its outcomes.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Aussie Dad