

Dear Consultation,

I am writing in answer to your call for submissions regarding the exposure draft of the Online Safety Bill 2020.

I welcome the majority of this Bill, but I am deeply disturbed by section 7 titled “Cyber-abuse material targeted at an Australian adult” and particularly section 7(1)(b) which makes it an offence to post something online if “an ordinary reasonable person would conclude that it is likely that the material was intended to have an effect of causing serious harm to a particular Australian adult”.

I am disturbed because in section 5 it also says, “serious harm means serious physical harm or serious harm to a person’s mental health, whether temporary or permanent” and “serious harm to a person’s mental health includes: (a) serious psychological harm; and (b) serious distress.”

I am a Christian and what particularly concerns me is that even sharing personal beliefs or quoting parts of the Bible would fit the above criterion if an ordinary person could claim that it is likely that the material was intended to have an effect of causing “serious harm” - which actually can just mean temporary distress.

And potentially anybody could claim that he was distressed by the Bible referring to all men as sinners who need to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Homosexuals too could claim to be offended by God seeking to turn and save them from their sin. And the list goes on.

I know that if this bill is passed without amendment, then not all those who share personal beliefs or quote the Bible online are going to be reported and fined; but the broad range of what could be classified as adult cyber-abuse does indeed make it likely that this law will engender many complaints, especially as there are many in our society who would love to take advantage of this law to persecute Christians.

Please, therefore, amend or remove section 7 of this bill so that it will not unintentionally criminalize ordinary things like sharing parts of the Bible or personal beliefs online.

Yours sincerely,

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