Submission

Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

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Introduction and Summary

The *Communications Legislation (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023* ("the Bill") represents a significant impediment to the right to freedom of speech. In a well-known novel by George Orwell, there is a "Ministry of Truth", an entity which "the Party" can decide what is and what is not true.[1] The legislation proposed in the Bill will make this a reality.

The legislation proposed by this Bill presents significant threats to Australian society by stifling freedom of speech and privacy (despite claims of protections being built in). It establishes the Australian Communications and Media Authority ("the ACMA") as an authority equivalent in power to that of a court of law, without the same standard of evidence, and effectively grants the ACMA the authority and power to bully, interrogate, coerce and manipulate Australian citizens.

An adversary can weaponise legislation against Australians, subjecting them to great distress from engaging in legal processes. It has happened before.[42]

This bill will also erode the right to freedom of speech, and the right to freedom of political expression as established in case law.[29] The ACMA's report mentions content relating to COVID-19 and the 2020 US Presidential Election as motivations for policy around misinformation and disinformation,[28] further supporting the notion that the purpose of this Bill is to impede freedom of speech and freedom of political expression. Very recently, political content has been censored under the guise of "misinformation".[47] [48]

The proposed instruments and legislation harms Australia's reputation internationally as a free democracy, which will have a domino effect on our economy and national security as we repel potential and existing allies. It also risks agitating the domestic and international IT and information security community, who are already disenfranchised by existing problematic legislation. It is prone to significant scope creep, similar to what has occurred in the past.[40] [41] There are insufficient checks and balances in relation to powers that will be assigned to the ACMA and the Minister.

Finally, in light of existing legislation and such instruments, that which is proposed by the Bill is completely unnecessary. There are limited provisions for education, with the Bill favouring a rigorously enforced censorship regime, with far greater potential for damage than intended.

After reading this submission in its entirety, or indeed just this summary, an intelligent or rational person can only conclude that the Bill, wholly or in part, must never pass, because it is a significant threat to our democracy, freedom of speech, privacy and our national security. Should the Bill pass, Australia will be another step closer to becoming a pioneer in violating the rights of its citizens.

1. Threats to society

1. The Fact Sheet states, *"Misinformation and disinformation pose a threat to the safety and wellbeing of Australians, as well as our democracy, society and economy."*[26] While this is true, it is worth noting that, over the last 3 years, a lot of false and unreliable information surrounding COVID-19 and the safety and efficacy of vaccines and extreme control measures, much of which originated or was spread by official sources and professional news outets. This has resulted in poor policy, causing significant and unnecessary distress and damage to peoples' lives, livelihoods and health. This has resulted in significant damage to Australia's economy and national security.[33]

2. In particular, qualified medical professionals who sought to promote other medicines and treatments have either been bullied, silenced, censored, or otherwise barred from providing the best care possible to patients.[43] Neither the Government, the ACMA nor digital platform services should be entrusted to powers that amount to being the central arbiters for truth, against facts and opinions from qualified professionals, regardless of whether or not they are deemed not desirable.

3. To foster a healthy democracy, society, and economy, citizens must be able to freely select what information they base their views on, and freely discuss this with others. This is a core tenet of the democratic process, and paramount to Australian democracy.

4. In relation to threats to our democracy as noted above **(1)**, it is impossible to have a democracy without the citizens of a nation being able to discuss the issues amongst themselves. As such, the Bill presents adds to the significant threat to democracy presented by legislation which stifles expression using the threat of retribution or remand.

5. The Bill, by effectively providing a single group or agency with unfettered authority and power to control what Australians can and cannot see, has the practical effect of allowing the truth to be distorted by one person or group.

6. There has been at least one incident where the eSafety Commissioner sought to make an example out of a social media platform, on the basis of it containing content she did not like, under the vague umbrella of "online hate". The platform was threatened with substantial fines for each day of non-compliance with a deadline.[44]

7. Where the Government displays such extreme distrust and contempt for the nation's citizens as it intends to do so by the introduction of this Bill, significant anger and distrust for authority including law enforcement will arise. This "us versus them" situation presents a significant problem in society where citizens will refuse to assist law enforcement with legitimate situations, and will adversely impact the safety of society and result in increased crime. There will also be an increase in vigilante activity where officials and law enforcement are viewed as doing little to combat real issues.

2. Previous attempts and existing legislation

1. There have been numerous attempts and legislation to enforce censorship, several of which have made it into legislation.

2. The government has previously attempted to engage in censorship regimes before, such as trials to implement nation-wide mandatory filtering of pornography (spearheaded by Stephen Conroy, with backing from the Australian Christian Lobby[37] and Family First parties[38]). During the trials, a number of small business websites, including that belonging to a local dentist, were blacklisted.[39] Although in the end, it did not find its way into legislation, many ISPs are blocking access to sites at the request of authorities, likely due to the fear of implications of going against them.

3. In 2015, the *Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979 (Cth)* was amended to require ISPs to collect and store extensive quantities of data about Australians' communications for 2 years.[31]

4. In 2018, the Australian Government introduced the *Assistance and Access Act 2018 (Cth)*, which allows authorities to force or threaten certain service providers into giving them access to encrypted data.

5. In 2021, the *Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth)* was introduced, and it essentially allows the eSafety Commissioner to force people who he/she determined were trolls, to apologise to children.

3. Australia's international reputation

1. If passed, the Bill shall be one of many pieces of legislation which places Australia's reputation in jeopardy. Section **2** of this submission notes existing legislation that has contributed towards Australia's declining reputation; such legislation also shows total disregard for Australian innovation and our national security. Of particular concern is our reputation with the international IT, information system security, and general security community.

2. Further to this, many laws have been passed which stifle innovation and stifle the Australian security industry in general, which has shown to have far reaching consequences in choking our ability to protect our national security interests.

3. Introducing this legislation will cement Australia internationally as an unsuitable place for trusted information systems infrastructure, which will cause undue amounts of damage to our economy and the security of the nation.

4. The private sector is often more than willing to assist in protecting Australian soil and participating in national security endeavours, however, legislation such as that which is proposed in the Bill, will most definitely serve to further anger an already disenchanted IT and information systems security community, which renders Australia exposed to hostile cybersecurity threats, as nobody will be willing to cooperate with government agencies they deem to be reprehensible.

5. The proposed legislation is a significant contribution towards cementing Australia amongst oppressive regimes such as North Korea and China.

4. Chilling effects

1. The Fact Sheet and Guidance Note[21] states *"The Bill includes strong protections for privacy and freedom of speech"* and details a number of items to the effect.[27] Freedom of speech involves the ability to freely, and without fear of suppression or oppression, exchange of ideas, views, and information. However, the Bill establishes ACMA, in collusion with the private sector and signatories to an industrial code of practice, as a "Ministry of Truth" which aims to restrict information available to the Australian public,[15] creating *"...an endless present in which the Party is always right."*[1]

2. The Fact Sheet attempts to reassure, *"The ACMA will not have the power to request specific content or posts be removed from digital platform services."*[26] However, *"The Bill would give the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) reserve powers to act, if industry efforts in regard to misinformation and disinformation are inadequate."*[26] This may include compelling digital platform services to remove content or posts, specific or otherwise.

3. The Fact Sheet states, *"Misinformation is online content that is false, misleading or deceptive, that is shared or created without an intent to deceive but can cause and contribute to serious harm."*[26] Criminal cases often require proof of *mens rea* (knowledge or intent to commit the crime), and failure to consider intent significantly undermines this tried and tested practice.

4. In relation to protections **(1)**, digital platform services will be self-censoring content in fear of running afoul of Government regulations or incentives. A prime example of such behaviour can be observed on platforms such as YouTube, where frivolous copyright takedown notices are often instantiated against individuals for the purposes of censorship. This impedes freedom of speech.

5. When defining *harm*, the Bill includes *"economic or financial harm to ... a sector of the Australian economy."*[4] This puts whistleblowers at risk of enforcement action or other malicious behaviour, on the basis of "economic or financial harm" for exposing malicious activity.

6. Much of the enforcement by digital platform services and government will have significant effects on freedom of speech, including freedom of political expression, as individuals self-censor to avoid criminal sanctions, or sanctions from the platform they use. This results in the audience being left to piece together the content which is incomplete, making it prone to misinterpretation.

7. The Bill presents adds significant red tape to digital platform services (such as the record-keeping requirements in Division 1, particularly Clause 1), which could result in smaller operators choose to close their services, or exit Australia entirely, which could adversely affect our economy.

8. Even if, hypothetically, the Bill were to add sufficient protections as to not directly impact individual freedoms, the practical effects of the red tape, legal hoops and legal anxiety this Bill places upon individuals and digital platform services, are of grave concern.

5. Inadequate checks and balances

1. The practical effect of the proposed legislation is to make the Government, via the private sector, the central arbiter of truth,[17] with the ACMA essentially acting as the judge, jury and executioner, with powers to compel individuals to appear in front of them, and issue fines and orders with similar effects to injunctions, whilst having no regards to commonly established criminal justice principles.[8] The standard of evidence appears to be reduced to, whatever ACMA believes.

2. The Bill states that *"excluded content for misinformation purposes means any of the following: (e) content that is authorised by: (i) the Commonwealth; or (ii) a State; or(iii) a Territory; or (iv) a local government."*[3] This implies that the government of the day will decide what constitutes "misinformation" or "disinformation". Or, as one might state in a colloquial manner, "rules for thee and not for me."

3. The Minister will be granted unchecked and unlimited powers to decide that a service used by the Minister is exempt or excluded.[6] This opens the door for corruption, where a special interest group can use the Minister to either stifle their competition or to make them immune from the entirety of legislation proposed by the Bill. Any checks and balances could be classified as "misinformation and disinformation" and essentially quashed by one individual.

4. The proposed legislation gives ACMA extensive powers under Division 3 to compel digital platform services into providing information at its beck and call. Clause 3 of this division is concerning due to having little to no protections against the ACMA interrogating an individual or competent officer of a body corporate into incriminating themselves under sufficient psychological pressure.

5. Although, Clause 4 states, *"a notice cannot require a person to give information or evidence, or produce a document or copy, that would reveal the content of a private message"*,[7] a person who is compelled as per Clause 3 to appear before the ACMA[7] may be instructed, during their appearance, to provide such information; this is likely to occur under undue psychological pressure or coercion from the ACMA or its affiliate bodies, members or employees.

6. The Bill offers insufficient protections against such psychological manipulation, coercion and pressure to provide such information; for instance, no provisions are made which:

a) allow anyone who appears before ACMA to record proceedings by a form they choose, including audio and/or video, for the purposes of protecting their lawful interest.

b) allow anyone who appears before ACMA to have either support persons or legal representation or other professional advocacy, which exposes them at undue risk of self-incrimination or an adverse finding against them.

c) require the ACMA or such enforcement body to provide reasonable compensation to account for time lost from work or business, or travel time, to appear before ACMA.

7. The above list **(6)** is not exhaustive, and more protections must be explored in full when considering giving any agency the effective power of a judicial body equivalent to a court of law. However, there is no reason why the ACMA needs these overreaching draconian powers in the first place, let alone protections so that such powers are not abused.

6. Insufficient scope constraints

1. The legislation proposed by the Bill is grossly disproportionate to the perceived threat, and provides a pathway for an impending scope expansion. Such scope creep occurred around the introduction of the metadata retention requirements,[31] where it was supposed to be only for police to access. Eventually over 60 agencies including Australia Post, the RSPCA of Victoria, and the Victorian Taxi Services Commission sought warrantless acccess to metadata.[40] [41]

2. As noted earlier in this submission **(4.2)**, there are provisions for reserve powers to be activated. There is no limitation to what point the Government would consider industry efforts to be inadequate such as to warrant activation of ACMA's reserve powers.

3. Although the Fact Sheet makes claims that the Bill includes protections for privacy, it also states that *"The powers apply to digital platform services that are accessible in Australia. Some examples include social media, search engines, instant messaging services (although the content of private messages will be out of scope), news aggregators and podcasting services."*[27] Many instant messaging services are often private in nature, and service either individuals discussing amongst themselves, or closed groups. This makes it unclear to those reading the Fact Sheet, as to whether such services will be covered by the proposed legislation or not.

4. Furthermore, with regards to claimed protections **(3)**, it is not technically practical or reasonable to cover instant messaging services due to the fluidity and short lifespan of instant messages on the server. Some services store messages for longer periods of time on the server, however they are not often generally accessible to the public.

5. One of the exemptions proposed is "professional news".[3] One of the largest threats to a democracy is restricting the sources of available information to that which is approved by a central authority or group,[5] who may have vested interests and possible ties with adverse entities.

6. The Guidance Note states, in relation to Clause 21 of the Bill, *"This section of the Bill only applies to individual natural persons who own and operate a digital platform service. The vast majority of providers of digital platform services are body corporates, which have no privilege against self-incrimination."*[25] This presents a legal conundrum, whereby no user of the service is safe from intrusive unchecked surveillance or censorship no matter which service they are using. Many organisations implement some kind of forum-like facility to enable their members to have discussions, and some even open these forums up to the public. The legislation proposed in the Bill will place significant burden on an owner of even a small community website or forum.

7. In addition to concerns raised above **(6)**, the Guidance Note also states *"The Bill provides that a person is not excused from answering a question or providing information or a document on the ground that the answer to the question, or the information or document, may tend to incriminate the person or expose the person to a penalty."*[25] This undermines significant portions of common law and criminal justice principles.

8. The Bill overall, effectively enables the ACMA to have extensive powers of a similar nature to those of a judiciary body, while significantly watering down the standards of evidence required for such a "conviction" and otherwise failing to clarify such requirements for evidence.

7. Freedom of political expression

1. Freedom of speech is the fundamental building block of democracy. Indeed, a subset of this has been recognised by the High Court of Australia, and is now well-known case law.[29] The Bill seeks to effectively undermine freedom of political expression in a digital environment.

2. For instance, the Guidance Note notes that *"The ACMA will be able to use its information powers in relation to election and referendum matters."*[24] Considering the time proximity between an impending referendum, known as "The Voice", recent censorship of political content,[47] [48] and the introduction of the Bill, a reasonable person will interpret this timing as an attempt to undermine the freedom of political expression.

3. In the same statement, the Guidance Notice also states *"Authorised electoral communications and electoral and referendum content will be out of scope of the code and standard-making powers, with the exception of disinformation from an unauthorised source as per clause 35 of the Bill."*[24] An exception is made where "the requirements relate to preventing or responding to disinformation on a digital platform service"[14] which can curtail political views in a public forum.

4. A number of social media sites have taken it upon themselves to serve as the arbiter of "misinformation and disinformation",[46] and a recent case involves a video comprising the inaugural speech of The Hon. John Ruddick MLC, within the NSW Legislative Council. This video was deleted by YouTube, who took it upon themselves to decide that it constitutes "medical misinformation".[47] Sky News journalist Peta Credlin also has reported censorship of her content, which fact checkers claim was false.[48] Ironically, the Bill mentions *"supporting fact checking"* as an example on what may be dealt with by misinformation codes and standards.[13]

5. Appendix C of the report submitted by the ACMA states, *"Almost all policy changes and new initiatives identified by the ACMA have been in response to either the COVID-19 pandemic or the 2020 US presidential election."*[28] This further supports the notion that, a primary purpose behind what is proposed by the Bill is to stifle dissent and freedom of political expression. There is evidence that the government has recently engaged in profiling and attempting to stifle freedom of speech in a manner that is not conducive to openness, transparency or honesty.[45]

6. Incidentally, ACMA is given the power to classify whatever they deem to be misinformation and disinformation, which can affect any content that has existed before the Bill or its proposed legislation is to be engaged.[20] This essentially gives ACMA full authority to force the hosts into rewriting history.

7. Clause 60 of the bill attempts to reassure us that the provisions *"have no effect to the extent (if any) that their operation would infringe any constitutional doctrine of implied freedom of political communication."*[18] However, it is obvious that the manner of which this Bill has proliferated, suggests that the intent is to stifle political communication. A lengthy legal battle would be required to keep the ACMA in check, and smaller digital platform services may not be able to afford this.

8. National security threats

1. This submission has so far briefly mentioned the national security implications of the legislation proposed within the Bill. This section aims to extrapolate this by providing some context to the claims. Ironically, despite the intention of protecting the community,[19] the Bill threatens our national security. Unimpaired freedom of speech is vital for ideas and innovations, and stifling such freedom will have a domino effect on our economy and eventually, our national security.

2. Where a government, or an agency belonging to such, engages legislation or other such instruments that incur similar effects, which has the practical effect of curtailing freedom of speech, the nation risks losing a significant advantage when it comes to identifying and acting upon threats to Australia's national security. Ironically, many of these instruments that have such chilling effects are legislated under the guise of protecting Australia's national security, though the practical effect is the opposite of the intent.

3. A concerning feature of the Bill is the implementation of record-keeping requirements, as per Division 2. The Australian Government requires ISPs to store metadata and history for all Australians,[31] which greatly puts the nation at risk of bad actors; such metadata can be used to profile individuals and put them at risk of being targeted for specific political beliefs, religious affiliation (or lack thereof), race or community status, or any reason an adversary so desires.

4. Excessive record-keeping requirements not dissimilar to those mentioned above **(3)** contributed significantly to recent cyber attacks, such as Optus,[34] government agencies such as Service NSW,[35] and a high profile case involving the US Office of Personnel Management, where millions of records containing extremely sensitive personal and private information of federal agents were compromised.[36] These situations were preventable or could have been ameliorated by not requiring information to be stored longer than necessary.

5. The Bill provides no protections or assurances of the secure destruction of records, and does not provide adequate guidelines and restrictions for how they are to be stored. Records may be stored overseas, which means they fall outside Australia's privacy legislation, and presents a significant national security threat. There appear to be no limits on the retention of records.

6. With any piece of legislation, it is vital to consider if, and how, it may be weaponised by an adversary. There have been some incidents where messages containing threats were fabricated in someone's name, and the person whose name was spoofed as the sender was arrested by police and questioned.[42] In the context of the proposed legislation, an adversary may hack a site and file a complaint to the ACMA, who will activate legal processes as per the Bill, against the site owner.

7. A central agency or group can be taken over by an adversary, who can weaponise the instruments and tools to legally bully, menace, silence or censor Australians' information. Providing these agencies with access to sensitive information, other than a strict need-to-know basis, also places Australians at risk of being influenced or coerced by an adversary.

8. Information is the blood of Australia's national security framework, and Australian citizens and civilians are its senses. They should not be restricted by a central arbiter of "misinformation and disinformation". The government would be best to spend its efforts in fostering healthy and productive cooperation between citizens and officials, by gaining their trust instead of losing it.

9. Insufficient protections for individuals

1. The consultation requirements as outlined per Subclause 26(d)(ii) of Division 2 of the Bill, appear to be the only protections given to a provider or individual who is likely to be affected by the publication of information as per Clause 25, which pertains to commercial interests;[12] however it does not require the ACMA to invite the provider to identify any information that could be considered personal information, or any information that, if published, poses undue risk to the reputation, character, or safety an affected provider or individual.

2. Although Subclause 26(e) could be interpreted as a form of balance to this,[12] an individual who is being compelled to appear before the ACMA needs to be aware of their rights, and the ACMA must be disallowed from dissuading, discouraging, limiting, restricting or forbidding any type or form of any objection or response whatsoever, within its invitation as per the requirements of this Clause 26.

3. The ACMA, or any other relevant authority, must not be allowed to order or require anyone involved with proceeding or engagement with them, to keep the presence and nature of such a proceeding confidential, other than personal or private information as would be covered under the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*. Such gag orders have been used to silence service providers before.[32]

4. The Bill references Part 7A of the *Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005 (Cth)*. This act allows an ACMA official to disclose sensitive information to a Minister.[30] This is contrary to claims made that this Bill includes protections for privacy as it is usurped by this Act.

5. Some important protections are suggested earlier in this submission **(5.6)**. As mentioned there, it is by no means an exhaustive list, and neither are any suggestions in this section **9**.

10. Lack of consideration of existing instruments

1. It is of significant concern that, instead of seeking to use already existing legislation and regulatory frameworks, some of which was only recently ratified, the Government seeks to implement new draconian legislation which is not only redundant, but now adds significant burdens on every Australian citizen wishing to discuss any matter.

2. There are often licencing requirements for providing advice to others, such as an Australian Financial Services Licence required for financial advice. Lawyers require an appropriate licence to practice law and provide legal advice.

3. False and misleading advertising is covered federally, by s.11 Schedule 6 of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2011 (Cth)*, the Australian Consumer Law.

4. Outside the realms of legislation, are Codes of Practice. The Guidance Note mentions, *"The Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation (the voluntary code) was launched on 22 February 2021 by Digital Industry Group Inc (DIGI). The code has eight signatories – Adobe, Apple, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Redbubble, TikTok and Twitter."*[22] Considering the significant impact these platforms have in the world today, and indeed in Australia, the Bill is completely unnecessary, as the private sector have already established such a regime in Australia, for the same purpose as that of legislation proposed in the Bill. As also stated in the Guidance Note, *"An effective self-regulatory scheme is the preferred approach."*[22]

11. Limited consideration for education before enforcement

1. The most effective means to combat misinformation and disinformation is education. Many government agencies have sections on their website for corrective press releases, and mainstream media outlets are often used to combat what the government or vested interests perceive to be misinformation and disinformation.

2. Excessive enforcement regimes, such as that presented by this Bill, only serve to fracture the relationship between the state and its citizens. This creates a fertile breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation, as it is within human nature to "fill in the gaps" where there is a void of verifiable information from official sources, or where it is presented in a confusing manner.

3. Conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation, often spread as a result of lack of openness, transparency, and willingness to engage the community in a reasonable manner. Instead of exploring these avenues, the Government seeks to enforce an extreme censorship regime with threats and legislation.[16] This has the opposite effect to the stated intentions of the Bill.

4. Attempting to censor or suppress content often results in that content spreading to a much wider audience. A recent example of this was when YouTube censored the inaugural speech of The Hon. John Ruddick MLC.[47] News of this censorship gained worldwide attention, and the re-uploaded YouTube video alone now has over 14,000 views within the span of approximately one month.[49]

12. Concerns about the consultation process

1. The consultation process currently seeks to refine details about the bill, however, no apparent reasonable attempt has been made to ascertain whether not this bill is necessary in the first place, especially in light of existing legislation and regulatory frameworks.

2. Among the items of request within the Guidance Notice, is *"the definitions of misinformation and disinformation"*.[23] In light of a bill which claims to curb a threat caused by such, and at the same time claims to protect freedom of speech and privacy, it is concerning that the Government seeks to criminalise that which the definition has not yet been clearly established.

3. The Government, in its consultation requests, seeks to identify how such legislation can be implemented, and how to widen its scope as much as possible without even considering as to whether or not this legislation is reasonable, proportionate, necessary, or even helpful. Instead, views are being sought specifically as to how Orwellian levels of censorship can be implemented, and what punishments can be given to those who fail to comply with such a regime.[23]

13. Contradictions between the Bill and supporting documents

1. As noted on in other sections in this submission (eg. **12**), there are numerous inconsistencies between the Guidance Notice, Fact Sheet, and the Bill.

2. The Fact Sheet states that the Bill *"includes strong protections for privacy and freedom of speech."*[27] However, the Bill does not make any attempt to exclude private groups and services, such as online forums that may belong to communities. This puts them at significant risk of harm from this legislation, should the Minister or ACMA decide that these communities contain "misinformation" or "disinformation", and is contrary to statements in the Fact Sheet and Guidance Note regarding the protection of freedom of speech.

3. Furthermore, many such communities make their sites available to the public, which would render them in line with Clause 10, in order to provide outsiders with some insight into the community and how it operates, and what it stands for. Rather than the ACMA and any government being the sole arbiter on what can be considered truth, the government should entrust the Australian public with the ability to make decisions for themselves; such is a core tenet of our democracy.

4. The purpose of ACMA's powers as outlined in this legislation, as well as the process for managing infringements, also appears to compel an individual into providing evidence that can be used in a court or other such body, as per Subclause 24(3), which states *"The certified copy must be received in all courts and tribunals as evidence as if it were the original."*[11]

5. One of the amendments in Schedule 2 inserts the Bill's intent as having regard for freedom of expression and respecting user privacy.[19] However, the overall nature of the Bill contradicts this.

In conclusion

It is hoped that, after reading and considering this submission, that Parliament will not pass this bill due to the unjustifiable amount of red tape, and extreme legal stress and anxiety it threatens to place on Australian citizens and service providers, as well as the IT and information security sectors.

When considering the Bill, it is hoped that Parliament will realise the adverse impact on our economy and ability to innovate, our national security, safety, and Australian's rights to freedom of speech and freedom of political expression. As part of the package with the rights to freedom of speech, Australians should also be entitled to seek whatever information source they see fit.

Many issues can be alleviated by encouraging a culture transparency and openness within our Government. Sadly, as recent events have demonstrated, this has not been the case, and the trust of the Australian public has been greatly eroded. Australians are the eyes and ears of our national security, and introducing draconian legislation will result in a blind Australia.

And in closing, Parliament should heed the warning "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." Although not religious, the author of this submission acknowledges the applicability of the aforementioned statement in the context of legislation, authority and powers.
The author pays their respects to libertarians past, present and future.

Footnotes and References

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