

Christopher Hansen  
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Subject: Submission on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my deep concern and outrage regarding the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. As an Australian citizen, I firmly believe that this bill undermines the fundamental principles of freedom of speech and disproportionately harms regular individuals who depend on the Internet as a democratic platform for expressing their opinions and sharing knowledge.

The provisions outlined in the bill create arbitrary distinctions between different classes of citizens, granting those in positions of power, such as politicians, journalists, and members of educational institutions, the authority to disseminate information, whether accurate or not, while imposing stricter limitations on the general public. This creates an unjust system where regular citizens, who often possess profound knowledge and industry insights, are curtailed in the exercise of their democratic rights.

The Internet, in my view, is the most remarkable and powerful democratic invention in the history of humanity. It has allowed ordinary individuals, who were previously voiceless, to participate in meaningful discussions and make their voices heard. This bill poses a significant threat to the empowerment of regular Australians by placing excessive fines on digital services, which would result in unprecedented constraints on freedom of speech on these platforms.

Furthermore, the all-encompassing nature of the proposed legislation, without any mechanisms for pressure relief valves, exacerbates the harm it could inflict on the freedom of speech. This bill assumes the ability to accurately distinguish between true and untrue information, which is an impossible task in a constantly evolving world where new information frequently contradicts what was once widely accepted as fact. The examples provided in this submission highlight the unpredictability and inherent flaw in assuming the ability to differentiate between fact and misinformation.

Notably, the bill not only targets provably false information but also deems true information as "misleading" or "deceptive." The value of freedom of speech lies in its allowance for open and honest discussions, enabling the exploration and debate of truth. Limiting speech to what is deemed "correct" or even what is not provably false stifles the diversity of viewpoints and hinders the crucial process of sense-making necessary for informed decision-making.

Even reputable experts, such as Dr. Nick Coatsworth, a former Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia, have expressed serious concerns about the scope and application of this bill. In a tweet on June 25th, 2023, he cautioned about the implementation of such legislation, stating that it would be impossible to enforce without penalizing non-misinformation and potentially stifling crucial discussions.

By assuming that the Government, its accredited media, and educational institutions are the sole arbiters of truth in collaboration with digital platforms, this bill disregards the experiences and viewpoints of ordinary Australians. It undermines the diversity of opinions necessary for a robust

democratic process and hinders the acquisition of vital information required to make informed voting decisions. Categorizing certain political party viewpoints as misinformation and removing them from digital platforms will leave voters in the dark and go against the very principles on which our democratic system is built.

In conclusion, I vehemently oppose the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. It is essential to protect and uphold the principle of freedom of speech as it enables a vibrant democratic discourse, fosters the pursuit of truth, and ensures an informed citizenry. I urge the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to reconsider the implications of this bill and prioritize the rights and voices of regular Australians.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Hansen