



## Australian Citizens Party

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### MEDIA RELEASE

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Tuesday, 18 July, 2023

## Denounce Albanese's Orwellian social media censorship law

Australians have until **6 20 August** [deadline extended] to [make submissions objecting to the government's bill to regulate truth on social media](#). See submission details below.

The Albanese government's Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is another dangerous lurch down the path to totalitarianism which all Australians should oppose.

The bill gives the government power to regulate "truth" online by being able to force social media platforms to censor "misinformation" and "disinformation" that is "harmful"—three vague terms that are open to very broad interpretation.

Until 6 August, Australians have the opportunity to make submissions to the government's consultation process on the exposure draft of the bill, to send a powerful message that such interference with free speech is unacceptable.

Watch Australian Citizens Party Research Director Robert Barwick discuss the implications of this bill on Martin North's "Walk The World" YouTube channel: [It's 21 Days to 1984!](#)

### Pretext

When the government justifies this law, it emphasises the misinformation and disinformation that circulated the internet during COVID, citing as its example the claim early in 2020 that 5G radiation caused COVID, which led to 5G towers in Australia and around the world being vandalised.

The truth, however, is that the Australian government and its closest geopolitical "partners" in the so-called Five Eyes countries—the USA, UK, Canada, and New Zealand—have been pushing for social media censorship powers since at least 2018.

As the ACP revealed in a 28 May 2019 release, "['Christchurch Call' establishes dangerous pretext for state censorship](#)", the global agenda for a "techno-Stasi police state" has been set by the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing (a.k.a. surveillance) alliance.

The ACP highlighted how an "August 2018 Five Eyes Ministerial gathering on Queensland's Gold Coast took aim at 'faster identification and removal of illicit content', and limiting 'coercive acts of interference and disinformation'."



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On 15 May 2019 New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron launched their "Christchurch Call" for internet censorship, in response to the Christchurch massacre; previously reluctant, the world's biggest social media platforms all signed on.

In the COVID years, those social media companies entered into informal arrangements with government agencies to aggressively police content on their platforms; with this bill, the Albanese government is trying to make those arrangements formal, and permanent.

As the ACP questioned in its 2019 release: "Identifying and removing illicit content featuring acts of terrorism, child sexual abuse and extremist violence is one thing, but who decides what constitutes 'disinformation'?"

That is the age-old question.

### Suppressing, not protecting, democracy

The government's justification in its own fact sheet accompanying the exposure draft of the bill illustrates its inherent dangers. It states:

"Misinformation and disinformation spread via digital platform services is a major issue worldwide. The rapid spread of false, misleading and deceptive information online has resulted in a multitude of harms from disrupted public health responses to foreign interference in elections and the undermining of democratic institutions."

Straight away, it's clear this bill goes much further than stopping vandalism of 5G towers, or live-streaming atrocities, into areas open to political debate, including the public health response to COVID-19, supposed foreign interference in elections, and "undermining" democracy.

The fact that the bill explicitly exempts any government communication, of any level of government, from being considered misinformation or disinformation, shows how Orwellian this law will be.

While the bill's penalties won't apply to individuals, it will enforce a regime of suppression of any speech on social media that undermines government claims.

It would not just apply to protecting public health, as we have already witnessed in the mass-



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censorship of contrary analysis relating to COVID-19, including of qualified doctors and scientists.

It would also apply to debates on foreign policy, such as whether Russia or China are "threats" to Australia, which the government claims to justify committing almost \$1 billion to arming NATO's proxy Ukraine against Russia, or promising \$368 billion to buy US and British submarines to deploy against China.

Will the ACP be de-platformed for saying the government is lying about Russia and China?

If these powers were in place in 2002, when the US, UK and Australian governments lied about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction, they could have been used to suppress public opposition to invasion and war.

### Stick to the principle

The ACP accepts that social media is rife with misinformation and disinformation; but the only way to combat it is to publicly refute it, not censorship.

Thinkers have struggled with the implications of free speech for centuries, and concluded that limiting speech is far more dangerous to society than the regrettable consequences of false claims.

That's why free speech is enshrined in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights in the US Constitution: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press".

And why it is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Australia helped to draft in 1948: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas *through any media* and regardless of frontiers." (Emphasis added.)

Social media is a double-edged sword: it can be a channel for the worst misinformation and disinformation, but so can governments, as we have witnessed; alternatively, it can also be the medium that exposes government and corporate lies that the corporate mainstream media won't, which restores power to the people.

Regulating truth on social media will not protect democracy, it will suppress it.

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### What you can do

Make a submission immediately—the deadline is 6 August.

A “submission” does not need to be a lawyer’s analysis; it’s simply a letter from you, as brief or as long as you like, stating your strong objection to the bill, and why.

[Click here for the government's exposure draft consultation website, which has instructions for uploading or emailing submissions.](#)