

# Submission to the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024

2024-09-30



## Foreword

Fusion thanks the [Environment and Communications Legislation Committee in the Senate](#) for the opportunity to make a submission about how misinformation should be addressed in Australia.

[FUSION: Science, Pirate, Secular, Climate Emergency](#) represents over 1,700 members who believe in technological advancement, climate action and civil liberties.

## Our Stance

Fusion Party Australia has always been a staunch defender of free speech and civil rights, rooted in our early beginnings with the Pirate Party, Science Party, Vote Planet, Climate Change Justice, and Secular Parties. We continue to uphold these values as we navigate the challenges of the modern digital age.

While Fusion Party Australia acknowledges the problem of misinformation, our instinct is to oppose this bill because we do not believe the government can responsibly wield the powers it seeks. We agree that misinformation is a serious issue, but our approach is to protect free speech by empowering individuals to make their own informed choices, not imposing state control on allowable opinions.

We would support the bill only if all our proposed improvements are fully adopted:

1. **Equal Accountability for All Media:** The law must apply equally to both traditional and social media, including in comment sections. If dual broadcasts (filtered and unfiltered) are legitimately impractical, exemptions could be granted, but these broadcasts must feature frequent, clear warnings that they are exempt from misinformation laws, and also direct consumers to a website with resources for understanding and dealing with misinformation.
2. **Consumer Choice:** Consumers must actively choose whether to filter misinformation, with no default setting (but is remembered on a browser level or similar). For minors aged 13-15, parents should make the decision, and choices should be adjustable at any time.
3. **No Blanket Censorship:** Completely blocking misinformation will push it underground. Existing laws already address harmful content, and further restrictions risk driving misinformation beyond Australian legal reach. We only propose that “misinformation” could be excluded from recommender systems and news feeds *by choice*, not totally removed.
4. **Imperfect Systems and Public Education:** We accept that no system will be perfect, and mistakes will occur. Instead of imposing extreme solutions, there should be both online and in-person community education to help citizens recognise misinformation and equip them with the tools to deal with it themselves, encouraging better-informed decision-making.
5. **Recommender Systems Transparency:** Social networks must clearly explain why they recommend particular content and provide users with the ability to block certain recommendations.



6. **Content Rating Tool:** We propose a government-funded, open source, platform agnostic tool to automatically score content as being potential “misinformation” using AI and crowd input. The tool would integrate into all platforms using an API - meaning it would be easy to implement even for new startup social networks. The tool would not be imposing censorship in itself, just judging individual pieces of content for the *Individual* to make a choice.
7. **Citizen-Led Content Policy Board:** A *sortition*-based Content Policy Board, composed of randomly selected citizens, would be responsible for setting policy and making directions regarding content types likely to mislead. Members would not usually assess individual content but would shape broader policy and how the tool should behave. These citizens would be compensated by the government, with their regular jobs protected by a "civic duty" leave entitlement. Participation would be voluntary. This function would help ensure that the tool functions according to community expectations rather than self-selecting individuals with a particular agenda to wield control over such a powerful tool which could be used for nefarious purposes.

In short, while misinformation is a big problem, this bill grants too much unchecked power to the government. We oppose this bill unless all our recommendations are adopted in full, ensuring consumer choice, transparency, and protection of free speech.



