



Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

Submission

About Comms Declare

Comms Declare is an incorporated not-for-profit that represents more than 400 communications professionals, agencies and organisations who have declared they will not promote:

- the growth of fossil fuels
- high greenhouse gas pollution as 'business as usual'
- deception, distraction or spin around science or climate actions.

Comms Declare encourages agencies to work for the good of the climate. In recognition that Australia is a major exporter of fossil fuels, it runs the annual F-list awards and maintains a list of agencies working with fossil fuel clients. It runs the Fossil Ad Ban and Smoke Kills campaigns asking for restrictions on ads for high emissions products. Comms Declare is partnering with WhoTargets.Me to help reveal political online advertising that aims to delay climate action.

Comms Declare

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Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

Coal, oil, gas companies, their lobby groups, high emissions industries such as internal combustion engine (ICE) cars and airlines, and their political and media supporters are using digital advertising to spread mis and disinformation, confuse the public and delay climate action.

Our primary recommendations are:

- The definition of 'serious harm' should be widened to include damage to the environment and climate.
- The definition of 'professional news content' should explicitly exclude opinion articles.

In addition, we believe that

- The government should bypass industry codes and immediately set a standard.
- That platforms should be forced to disclose the algorithms that spread mis and disinformation and what is being done to remedy this.
- That all platforms are forced to have more comprehensive ad libraries open to the public.

1. Serious Harm

The biggest threat to the health¹, security² and wellbeing³ of Australians is climate change, so it is irresponsible for the government to exclude it from the definition of 'serious harm'.

We believe incorrect and misleading online content about climate change, fossil fuels, renewable energy and associated topics is largely responsible for the mis-education of the Australian public, and the subsequent failure of successive governments to support adequate emissions reduction policies.

2. Professional News Content

Opinion articles are not subject to the same fact checks or regulations as normal news content and are often sources of mis and disinformation that are magnified across social media.

For example, the headline from a one-sided opinion article by an oil and gas lobbying organisation in the Australian newspaper titled 'Green gas ban would devastate the economy'⁴ was later presented as fact and without context on the Advance Australia website.

¹https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/66791cf6e25a0b806f6a4e5c/66c306316cee46b3bf1ddb6_Fossil_Fuels_Health_-2_compressed.pdf

²https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/NationalSecurity/Final%20Report/c02

³<https://www.climatechange.environment.nsw.gov.au/impacts-climate-change/climate-impacts-our-health-and-wellbeing#:~:text=The%20impacts%20of%20climate%20change,room%20visits%2C%20hospitalisations%20and%20deaths.>

⁴<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/greens-gas-ban-would-devastate-the-economy/news-story/a22e102c258203910123ae886ee30a0b>



Photo:

[https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=854636796756727&set=a.446943997526011&_cft_\[0\]=AZWku86XaWytGB8C9ZAN4iB5YQtxHrG-9jHNJw9H9tYYImugp3iKBqMXwoMYXQj-ufMr5HR-bzLpsPxOb1YnzLB8hnhB-b5M9dm29MLTZmbZ032wTqXqaoYUkepNrVOJfGhi45KzAhklbSSObTzBbj7Dq-1SiELaWLd7AvOiGqq_y1QVk2Rg297PP0OBG8Mzhq8&_tn=EH-R](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=854636796756727&set=a.446943997526011&_cft_[0]=AZWku86XaWytGB8C9ZAN4iB5YQtxHrG-9jHNJw9H9tYYImugp3iKBqMXwoMYXQj-ufMr5HR-bzLpsPxOb1YnzLB8hnhB-b5M9dm29MLTZmbZ032wTqXqaoYUkepNrVOJfGhi45KzAhklbSSObTzBbj7Dq-1SiELaWLd7AvOiGqq_y1QVk2Rg297PP0OBG8Mzhq8&_tn=EH-R)

Sky News Australia has been declared a global hub for misinformation by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue⁵.

Sky News Australia digital platforms on YouTube and Facebook regularly promote opinions about climate change that have been debunked by scientists. For example, climate scientist Professor Andy Pitman, had to publicly refute the misuse of his work by Sky News commentator, Andrew Bolt who used it to argue that global heating is good for the planet.⁶ The biased and uninformed commentary about climate science by Andrew Bolt, Chris Kenny and others in News Corp media is clearly published with the aim of misleading the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. We are happy to answer questions or contribute further in any way.

⁵ <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-in-the-news/sky-news-australia-hub-for-climate-misinformation-and-delayism/>

⁶ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/article/hes-cherry-picking-with-intent-heres-what-the-climate-scientist-andrew-bolt-keeps-quoting-would-like-you-to-know/r4f9kp3aj>