

Canberra Declaration
1A–227 Cordeaux Road
Mount Kembla NSW 2526
+61 02 4272 9100
info@canberradeclaration.org.au

10th July 2023

SUBMISSION:

**Communications Legislation Amendment
(Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023**

Dear Committee:

Enclosed is our feedback regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment
(Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

With over 90,000 signatories, the Canberra Declaration is a grassroots network that exists to champion the Judeo-Christian beliefs and values that undergird Australia. We believe that freedom — freedom of speech especially — is the birthright of every Australian.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to contribute on this critical issue and for taking the time to review our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Warwick Marsh, Co-Founder and Co-Drafter, Canberra Declaration

Alison Marsh, Co-Founder, Canberra Declaration

Kurt Mahlburg, Research & Features Editor, Canberra Declaration

Samuel Hartwich, Research Consultant, Canberra Declaration

Jean Seah, Managing Editor, The Daily Declaration

Kym Farnik, Prayer Coordinator, Canberra Declaration

www.canberradeclaration.org.au



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1.0 Executive Summary | 4 |
| 2.0 ‘Defining Misinformation’ | 5 |
| 2.1 Australia’s Commitment to Freedom of Speech | 6 |
| 2.2 Freedom is the Birthright of Every Australian | 7 |
| 2.3 Freedom of Speech Means Freedom to Dissent | 9 |
| 2.4 The Government Must Be Held Accountable | 10 |
| 3.0 Three Case Studies | 11 |
| 3.1 Case Study One: Treatment for Gender Dysphoric Children | 11 |
| 3.1.1 ‘Watchful Waiting’ Returns to Prominence | 13 |
| 3.1.2 The Testimony of Detransitioners | 16 |
| 3.1.3 Transgender Treatment and ACMA’s Proposed Powers | 19 |
| 3.2 Case Study Two: Climate Change | 20 |
| 3.2.1 Failed Doomsday Climate Predictions | 21 |
| 3.2.2 Dishonesty and Fraud in Climate Research | 24 |
| 3.2.3 A False Consensus on Climate Hysteria | 26 |
| 3.2.4 Climate Change and ACMA’s Proposed Powers | 28 |
| 3.3 Case Study Three: COVID-19 | 29 |
| 3.3.1 Covid-19: The Ideal Case Study | 30 |
| 3.3.2 The Great Barrington Declaration | 31 |
| 3.3.3 The False Promise of Vaccine Immunity | 32 |
| 3.3.4 A ‘Conspiracy Theory’ That Came True | 35 |
| 3.3.5 False ‘Facts’ That Frightened the Public | 36 |
| 3.3.6 Collusion Between Governments and Big Tech | 37 |
| 3.3.7 Covid-19 and ACMA’s Proposed Powers | 40 |
| 4.0 Conclusion | 41 |

1.0 Executive Summary

We could not be more strongly opposed to the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. The enhanced powers the proposed bill would grant the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) would effectively silence an organisation like ours, along with countless other Australian individuals and organisations whose views on social issues are subject to being falsely characterised as ‘misinformation’ and/or ‘disinformation’ by Commonwealth agencies, politicians, commentators, community leaders and media figures.

The Canberra Declaration exists to champion the Judeo-Christian beliefs and values that undergird Western civilisation, and Australian society in particular. One of the main channels through which we champion our values, spread our message, build our supporter base and fund our important work is social media. Our news and commentary site the *Daily Declaration* has a reach of half a million views each year. Much of this traffic comes via our footprint on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Today, to even claim that the freedoms, advantages, opportunities, values and liberties we enjoy in our nation are products of the Christian worldview is to invite accusations of ‘misinformation’. Additionally, our stance on critical social issues like religious freedom, marriage and family, and the sanctity of human life likewise make us liable to the same unfair accusations.

For our sake and for the sake of all Australians, we put on record our wholehearted rejection of the proposed bill.

2.0 ‘Defining Misinformation’

By proposing a bill like the one in question, the Albanese Government is entering extremely murky waters. Terms like ‘misinformation’, ‘disinformation’, ‘fake news’ and ‘hate speech’ are frequently used by critics, regulators, bureaucrats and political actors to smear ideas they don’t like and to restrict people’s freedom to express those ideas. Very often, the use of such terms betrays more about the people wielding them than the speech they wish to prohibit.

A concept like ‘misinformation’ is unavoidably subjective. What one person regards as ‘misinformation’, another may deem to be a perfectly moral viewpoint, a fact of nature, or a self-evident proposition. On countless subjects, even the line between what is fact and what is opinion is hotly debated.

Moreover, what society regards as ‘misinformation’ at one point in time can, within just the space of a few years, be embraced as true — or vice versa.

Thus we are faced with a most consequential question — namely, who gets to decide what is true versus what is ‘misinformation’? The political party that forms government? The majority of citizens? CEOs of media conglomerates? Intergovernmental bodies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the World Health Organisation or the World Economic Forum?

Moreover, who informs Australians when certain ideas — new or old — cross the subjective threshold from true to mere matter of opinion to ‘misinformation’?

Without answers to these questions, the Albanese Government is demanding that Australians sign a blank cheque — to surrender their freedom of speech online to unknown, unseen and undefined forces.

2.1 Australia’s Commitment to Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right of every Australian. In defining what constitutes the values of Australia, the Department of Home Affairs features “respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual” and “freedom of religion (including the freedom not to follow a particular religion), freedom of speech, and freedom of association” at the very top of its list.¹

Australia is a founding member of the United Nations and an original signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 18 of that declaration reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.²

Article 19 takes this right even further:

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.

¹ “Australian values,” *Department of Home Affairs*, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/Pages/australian-values.aspx>.

² “Universal Declaration of Human Rights — English,” *United Nations*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/universal-declaration/translations/english>.

Australia's commitment to these inalienable, universally-agreed-upon human rights has not been revoked. On its website, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade states that:

Australia's commitment to human rights is enduring: we were an original signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. We have been a leading proponent of its consistent and comprehensive implementation.³

In short, the passage of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 would put the Commonwealth of Australia in breach of its international human rights obligations and at odds with its own nation's character and values. This is a threshold Australia must not pass.

2.2 Freedom is the Birthright of Every Australian

Freedom of speech is widely acknowledged as the starting point for all other political liberties.

The Founding Fathers of the United States laboured long over the question of liberty. According to Benjamin Franklin, "Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation, must begin by subduing the freeness of speech." The nation's first President George Washington was sterner still, writing, "If the freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter."

There is simply no way to silence the speech of those who hold unpalatable views without doing irreparable, long-term harm to the culture and nation at large.

³ "Australia's commitment to human rights," *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights>.

What the drafters of this bill fail to recognise is that human rights are non-negotiable. They do not belong to any government, nor are they granted by government. To quote Benjamin Franklin once more, “Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men, but a right that belongs to us by the laws of God and nature.”

Freedom of speech is the birthright of every Australian. It is the role of the Commonwealth of Australia to recognise that fact and to protect the freedoms that every Australian already possesses.

The impulse to decide which speech constitutes ‘misinformation’ and must be censored is, at heart, totalitarian. By giving government agencies increased power over the words that Australian citizens are allowed to utter, the Albanese Government tempts tyranny. In the wise words of Thomas Jefferson, “a government big enough to give you everything you want is strong enough to take everything you have.”

Last century, many nations responded to times of uncertainty by giving their governments unprecedented power, including and especially over the speech of their citizens. In many cases, those experiments ended in horror and bloodshed. Communist and Fascist leaders alike won the trust of the masses with grand promises that could only be fulfilled by making every aspect of life the concern of government. But as C.S. Lewis sagely warned:

Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive... those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.

As they say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

2.3 Freedom of Speech Means Freedom to Dissent

British novelist and critic George Orwell warned, “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.” A freedom that only allows sanctioned, inoffensive speech but silences provocative ideas or ideas that challenge the consensus viewpoint is not a freedom worth having. In fact, it is not freedom at all.

Orwell also warned that our failure to appreciate this fact won’t just hurt others—it will come back to bite us. “If you encourage totalitarian methods, the time will come when they will be used against you instead of for you.” American philosopher Thomas Paine issued a smilier caution: “He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.”

It is the obligation of the Australian government to let its citizens speak freely and express ideas that run counter to the majority viewpoint on any given subject. Disagreement and dissent is not violence. Hurting people’s feelings is not violence. It is not the role of the Commonwealth to prevent the people of Australia from saying silly things, or even things that might — in they eyes of government agencies — cause ‘harm’.

People must be free to speak against ideas and ideologies they disagree with. All ideas — including those embraced by the majority of people — must be open to debate, criticism and even ridicule. Even if dissenters are wrongheaded, they must be allowed to believe and say things that are patently untrue and absurd. If not, the entire premise of human rights is undermined and its edifice comes tubing down.

To be clear, in Australia, penalties are already imposed on those who incite violence against individuals or groups in the community. Inciting violence has always been a criminal offence under the common law and it is also an offence under various state statutes.

What the bill in question proposes is that those with power get to decide which views and opinions it deems ‘misinformation’, and can therefore suppress.

2.4 The Government Must Be Held Accountable

The single most concerning aspect of the bill’s exposure draft is that “content that is authorised by the Commonwealth or a State” along with “professional news content” would be granted immunity from the proposed ACMA powers. Such a proposal invites comparisons to George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and to political regimes that allow only government operatives and State-sanctioned news outlets to guide the public discourse.

Just a few years ago, anyone suggesting the Australian government would do such a thing would have been dismissed as a conspiracy theorist. Now we are just months away from that bone-chilling scenario potentially passing into law.

On behalf of all freedom-loving Australians, we condemn this draft bill and plead in the strongest possible terms that the citizens of Australia be allowed to continue holding their government to account.

3.0 Three Case Studies

To more fully communicate our opposition to this bill, we will provide three concrete examples of how the concept of ‘misinformation’ can easily be weaponised against those who dissent from consensus viewpoints.

All three of the topics to be discussed below are contentious. All three are currently the subject of debate in Australia and across the Western world. In all three cases, those who hold a dissenting viewpoint on the topic have regularly but often unfairly been accused of spreading ‘misinformation’.

Most importantly, in all three cases, so-called ‘misinformation’ has turned out to be true, or is now the ascendent and/or consensus viewpoint.

We refer to medical treatment for gender dysphoric children; climate change; and COVID-19.

3.1 Case Study One: Treatment for Gender Dysphoric Children

For well over five years, it has been standard clinical practice in Australia to use the ‘gender affirmative model’ (also known as the Dutch protocol) when treating children and youth experiencing gender dysphoria.

As the name suggests, the gender affirmative model involves encouraging the child’s decision to identify as the gender they feel most comfortable with. This includes social affirmation, such as changing names, pronouns, hair or clothing; legal affirmation, like changing their legal name or gender; and ‘medical affirmation’, all the way up to using hormones, puberty blockers and surgery on breasts and genitals.

The main alternative to the gender affirmation model is the ‘watchful waiting model’, a therapeutic approach in which the young person is supported to work through their feelings but no particular outcome is aimed for apart from assisting the child in making the wisest possible decision for themselves.

The watchful waiting model takes into account many facts ignored by the gender affirmation model, such as the irreversible effects of cross-sex hormone treatment and surgery, the widespread phenomenon of young people desisting from gender dysphoria and seeking to detransition after treatment, the lack of credible improvements in mental health, and patterns of treatment-associated harms following the ‘gender affirmation’ pathway.

So strong has support for the ‘gender affirmation model’ been that Australian health agencies, politicians, non-profits and media personalities insist that any other approach must not be countenanced.

For example, the Australian Professional Association for Trans Health (AusPATH) claims in its Public Statement on Gender Affirming Healthcare that anything other than full affirmation “may involve pressure on the person to conform to the gender presumed for them at birth,” and is therefore “associated with significantly higher odds of lifetime suicide attempts and severe psychological distress”. The statement adds:

AusPATH believes that psychotherapeutic (including psychoanalytic) approaches used outside and/or instead of gender affirming healthcare are experimental, risk harm [and] raise ethical concerns.⁴

⁴ “AusPATH: Public Statement on Gender Affirming Healthcare, including for Trans Youth,” *AusPATH*, <https://auspath.org.au/2021/06/26/auspath-public-statement-on-gender-affirming-healthcare-including-for-trans-youth/>.

State and territory legislation has been relaxed to open the door to the gender affirmation model, while media outlets across Australia — not least the taxpayer-funded ABC — sing its praise and label other approaches dangerous.

Given this climate, if we were to imagine that ACMA already possessed the powers proposed in this bill, it is entirely conceivable that anyone supporting the watchful waiting model or opposing the gender affirmation model would be flagged for ‘misinformation’ and censored on social media. *After all*, it would be reasoned, *the lives of transgender children and youth will be at risk if they are not fully affirmed*.

3.1.1 ‘Watchful Waiting’ Returns to Prominence

And yet, in recent years, the tide has begun to turn on this very issue.

The Tavistock Centre in the United Kingdom, which had transitioned 20,000 gender dysphoric children and youth, was deemed unsafe in mid 2022 in its ‘gender-affirming’ practices and closed at the beginning of 2023. It has since been replaced by regional clinics with more holistic approaches to care.

An independent review headed by paediatrician Dr Hilary Cass, former president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, found the clinic’s standards of care failed its minor patients. In an open letter to England’s National Health Service, she wrote:

My interim report highlighted the gaps in the evidence base regarding all aspects of gender care for children and young people, from epidemiology through to assessment, diagnosis, support, counselling and treatment.⁵

⁵ “Interim report,” *The Cass Review*, <https://cass.independent-review.uk/publications/interim-report/>.

The report followed legal action against Tavistock for medical damages by detransitioner Keira Bell. A tomboy with divorced parents, 14-year-old Bell discovered American transgender activists on YouTube. Feeling this was the answer to her problems, she obtained a referral to the Tavistock Centre in north London, where after just three counselling sessions she was prescribed puberty blockers at the age of 16, followed by testosterone a year later.

In the court cases surrounding Tavistock, judges warned clinicians to “be alive to the possibility of regulatory or civil action” over the transitioning of young people. That is now a reality, with law firm Pogust Goodhead announcing that 1,000 families plan to join a medical-negligence class action against Tavistock.⁶

Under its “gender affirmative care” model, the Tavistock Centre often prescribed puberty blockers to children without addressing the root causes of their gender dysphoria, such as family trauma, sexual abuse, bullying, or various mental health issues.

A panel of three High Court judges found that “it was highly unlikely that a child aged 13 or under would be competent to give consent to the administration of puberty blockers. It was also doubtful that a child aged 14 or 15 could understand and weigh the long-term risks and consequences of the administration of puberty-blocking drugs.”⁷

Following the Cass report, the NHS issued new transitioning guidelines for minors. It now recommends a ‘watchful approach’ and asks doctors to spend time exploring all underlying

⁶ “1000 Families to Sue Tavistock Gender Service,” *Medscape UK*, <https://www.medscape.co.uk/viewarticle/1000-families-sue-tavistock-gender-service-2022a10021ac>.

⁷ “Bell v Tavistock Judgment,” *Courts and Tribunals Judiciary*, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Bell-v-Tavistock-Judgment.pdf>.

health problems — including mental health issues, family issues and conditions like autism — to better reflect the complexity of gender identity development in children.⁸

As a warning against medical intervention, the NHS guidelines state clearly that, in most prepubescent children, gender incongruence “may be a transient phase... [that] does not persist into adolescence”. It warns that even social transitioning (e.g. wearing the clothes of the opposite sex, use of neutral-gender pronouns) should not be seen “as a neutral act”, but as an intervention in its own right with potential significance for a young person’s psychological functioning.

As for teenagers, the NHS guidelines say that it cannot be predicted which children will persist in dysphoria over the years, and which will desist and re-embrace their birth sex. Therefore, any consideration of transitioning treatments must be based on “consistent and persistent” gender dysphoria, not just gender incongruence, and the teenager must show full comprehension of the implications of transitioning.

The United Kingdom is not the only nation where the consensus has shifted on treatments for transgender youth. Florida’s Board of Medicine now prohibits the use of hormonal and surgical interventions for children with gender incongruence or gender dysphoria. In fact, in the United States, no fewer than twenty states have enacted legislation protecting minors from transgender surgeries and related procedures.⁹

Even Europe, where the Dutch protocol first rose to prominence, is turning against the gender affirmative model. According to *The Atlantic*:

⁸ “Specialist service for children and young people with gender dysphoria,” *NHS England*, https://www.engage.england.nhs.uk/specialised-commissioning/gender-dysphoria-services/user_uploads/b1937-ii-specialist-service-for-children-and-young-people-with-gender-dysphoria-1.pdf

⁹ “‘Cruel’ and ‘extreme’: Governor vetoes bill to protect children from risky transgender surgery, puberty blockers,” *The Blaze*, <https://www.theblaze.com/news/louisiana-bans-transgender-surgery-on-children>.

In Finland, for example, new treatment guidelines put out in 2020 advised against the use of puberty-blocking drugs and other medical interventions as a first line of care for teens with adolescent-onset dysphoria. Sweden's National Board of Health and Welfare followed suit in 2022, announcing that such treatments should be given only under exceptional circumstances or in a research context. Shortly after that, the National Academy of Medicine in France recommended *la plus grande réserve* in the use of puberty blockers. Just last month, a national investigatory board in Norway expressed concerns about the treatment.¹⁰

3.1.2 The Testimony of Detransitioners

A major factor that is causing a re-think of treatment for transgender youth is the number of young people detransitioning after first undergoing hormone therapy and invasive surgery. 17-year-old Californian Chloe Cole is one such individual. She testified before legislators about how she was groomed by gender-affirming doctors and psychologists into transitioning to a “male” starting at the age of 13.

Chloe had a double mastectomy at 15, but two years later, she has reclaimed her identity as a female. She mourns the fact that she will never be able to breastfeed her future children and laments that she now lives with urinary tract infections and perhaps a stunted reproductive system.

In October 2022, Chloe and a group of fellow detransitioners wrote an open letter to United States Attorney General Merrick Garland.¹¹ It read:

¹⁰ “A Teen Gender-Care Debate Is Spreading Across Europe,” *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2023/04/gender-affirming-care-debate-europe-dutch-protocol/673890/>.

¹¹ “Detransitioners Respond: A Letter to Attorney General Garland,” *Reality's Last Stand*, <https://www.realityslaststand.com/p/detransitioners-respond-a-letter>.

Dear Attorney General Garland,

We are writing as a group of individuals who formerly identified as transgender. Many of us were young teenagers when we decided, on the direction of medical “experts,” to pursue irreversible hormone treatments and surgeries to bring our bodies into closer alignment with what we thought was our true “gender identity.” Many of us had extensive histories of mental illness. Many of us had experienced significant childhood trauma. But all of this was ignored because we uttered the word “gender.” This utterance placed us on a narrow medical pathway that led us to sacrifice our healthy bodies and future fertility in obeisance to the claim that our suffering was a result of having a “gender identity” that did not “match” our biological sex. In other words, we were “born in the wrong body.”

We didn’t know better; we were young, and we trusted our doctors. Our parents were also misled. They were told the common myth that if they did not “affirm” our new identities, which entailed fully approving our medical transition, then we would likely commit suicide. Given these options, what loving parent wouldn’t choose to transition their child? This is not informed consent, but a decision forced under extreme duress.

Some of us have chosen to speak out publicly about the harm that “gender affirming care” has caused us. But most detransitioners choose to remain silent or anonymous, because unlike the joyful and supportive communities that welcome all who transition, no such loving community awaits us. Instead, we are routinely harassed and browbeaten into silence for being an inconvenience to popular narratives around “gender.” But our growing population is becoming impossible to ignore, and others have started amplifying our suppressed voices by denouncing the

uncontrolled medical experiments being performed on children in hospitals in the name of “gender affirming care.”

The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Children’s Hospital Association fully endorse the “gender affirmation” model of care, which prevents medical professionals from questioning a child’s self-reported transgender identity, and from exploring possible underlying factors causing their dysphoria. These endorsements, however, run counter to the recommendations of other countries, such as Sweden, Finland, and the U.K., who have conducted systematic reviews of evidence and concluded, unanimously, that the risks and uncertainties outweigh any known benefits. American medical organizations have not conducted a systematic review of the evidence; their recommendations are based on a small number of badly flawed studies and ignore contravening evidence from other studies (precisely what systematic reviews are meant to prevent).

The recent letter by these groups calling on the DOJ to put pressure on social media companies to censor who they portray as “high-profile users on social media” sharing “false and misleading information” is nothing more than an attempt to silence the reasonable voices of concerned critics calling for a more cautious approach to experimental medical practices impacting vulnerable children...

The medical safeguarding of children should not be a political issue. Since truth is a prerequisite for justice, we must ensure that the already hot embers of political tribalism are not stoked. Children deserve the best evidence-based medical care available. Silencing the victims and critics of “gender affirming” practices is not a pathway to truth and justice, but to ignorance and further harm.

Please do the right thing.

Signed,

Chloe Cole

Helena Kerschner

Cat Cattison

Sinéad Watson

Grace Lidinsky-Smith

Ritchie

Prisha Mosley

3.1.3 Transgender Treatment and ACMA's Proposed Powers

The major shifts that are taking place in regards to treatment for gender dysphoric youth are a perfect case study demonstrating why the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 must be rejected.

If we cast our minds back over the last five years and imagine ACMA possessing the powers proposed in this draft bill, the agency would very likely have labelled as 'misinformation' any approach that deviated from the gender affirmation model. And yet in the last year or two, the gender affirmation model has been subjected to intense scrutiny and is now being legislated against in various nations.

These developments show why it is highly unethical for government bodies to create artificial bias in important social debates. ACMA must not be granted the power to label legitimate viewpoints as 'misinformation' and suppress them. Social media platforms are part of the modern-day 'town square' where controversial issues are debated, discussed and resolved — and where consensus is both formed and, when necessary, overturned. It is

largely because of social media that the watchful waiting model has regained prominence in many nations.

The integrity of all future social debates — including those of special concern to vulnerable children and youth — is seriously threatened by a Commonwealth that seeks to silence the speech of its citizens.

3.2 Case Study Two: Climate Change

Another important debate taking place in western nations is climate change and policy responses to it. The climate change discussion is directly relevant to the draft bill in question, since the bill seeks to suppress ‘misinformation’ that causes ‘harm’ — and in defining harm, the bill includes harm to ‘the environment’.

There is no question that, if enacted, the bill would empower ACMA to silence claims on social media that run counter to climate change orthodoxy.

Climate change orthodoxy states that since the 1800s, humans have been the main drivers of climate change through burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. Burning these fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions that create a blanket around the earth, trapping the sun’s heat and raising global temperatures, now to dangerously high levels.

Associated with this view is the widespread belief, prompted by a 2018 United Nations IPCC report and repeated by many respected political leaders since, that humanity has only around a decade left before a climate catastrophe befalls us.¹²

¹² “We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report>.

It is true that since the Industrial Revolution, the atmospheric concentration of one greenhouse gas in particular — carbon dioxide (CO₂) — has risen by over 50%. It also is reasonable to attribute most of this increase to human activity.

But leaping to the belief that a global catastrophe is therefore just around the corner is an extreme position. Unfortunately, it is also now the consensus position. For the record, the IPCC report was grossly misinterpreted by those preaching a climate apocalypse within a decade.¹³

3.2.1 Failed Doomsday Climate Predictions

Unfortunately, most who accept climate alarmism are unaware that climate scientists and the media have been making doomsday climate predictions for well over a century.¹⁴ That so many ‘Chicken Little’ predictions have fallen flat is now omitted from public discourse, but it is a matter of history, as demonstrated below.

The apocalyptic predictions made include global famine, mass extinctions, a hole in the ozone layer, acid rain, island nations disappearing below the sea, melting polar ice caps, and many other catastrophes that have failed to materialise.¹⁵

Consider just a selection of them.

In 1981, a NASA scientist predicted global warming of “almost unprecedented magnitude” over the next century that would melt swathes of Antarctica and cause a rise in

¹³ “12 Years to Disaster? How Climate Activists Distort the Evidence,” *You Tube*, <https://youtu.be/Kb3Tnmwx7Rc>.

¹⁴ “130 Years of Failed Climate Predictions,” *Time for Truth*, <https://timefortruth.blog/2023/01/04/130-years-of-failed-climate-predictions/>.

¹⁵ “Wrong Again: 50 Years of Failed Eco-pocalyptic Predictions,” *Competitive Enterprise Institute*, <https://cei.org/blog/wrong-again-50-years-of-failed-eco-pocalyptic-predictions/>.

sea level of up to 6 metres.¹⁶ In fact, in the last quarter century, sea levels have risen less than 8 cm.¹⁷

In 1987, a U.C. Berkley professor who later served in the Obama administration predicted that a billion people could die from famines due to climate change. He reaffirmed his prediction two decades later.¹⁸ In fact, today the world produces enough food to feed everyone, and although hunger and undernourishment persist, these metrics have plummeted for decades running.¹⁹

In 2001, the IPCC predicted that milder winter temperatures will decrease heavy snowstorms.²⁰ Around the same time, one senior climate scientist at the University of East Anglia forecast that within a few years, winter snowfall would become “a very rare and exciting event,” saying, “children just aren’t going to know what snow is”.²¹ In fact, since 1967 snow cover in the Northern Hemisphere has grown, with above average snow coverage for almost every year of the 2010s.²²

Also in 2001, the IPCC predicted that climate change would lead to prolonged fire seasons, more days with severe burning conditions, increased lightning activity and

¹⁶ “STUDY FINDS WARMING TREND THAT COULD RAISE SEA LEVELS,” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/22/us/study-finds-warming-trend-that-could-raise-sea-levels.html>.

¹⁷ “Sea Level Rise,” *Global Change*, <https://www.globalchange.gov/browse/indicators/global-sea-level-rise>.

¹⁸ “Obama’s Science Czar Considered Forced Abortions, Sterilization as Population Growth Solutions,” *Fox News*, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/obamas-science-czar-considered-forced-abortions-sterilization-as-population-growth-solutions>.

¹⁹ “Hunger and Undernourishment,” *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/hunger-and-undernourishment>.

²⁰ “Working Group II Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability,” *IPCC*, <https://www.ipcc.ch/working-group/wg2/?idp=569>.

²¹ “Snowfalls are now just a thing of the past,” *The Independent*, <https://wattsupwiththat.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/snowfalls-are-now-just-a-thing-of-the-past-the-independent.pdf>.

²² “Northern Hemisphere Snow Cover Extent,” *National Centers for Environmental Information*, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/monthly-report/global-snow/202210>.

therefore more fires and larger areas burned.²³ In fact, the global area of land burned each year declined by 24% between 1998 and 2015.²⁴

In 2005, experts from the World Conservation Union predicted a polar bear population decline of 30% over the next 35 to 50 years.²⁵ In fact, over the following decade, the estimated polar bear population rose by around 18%.²⁶

In 2007, environmentalist Tim Flannery predicted that Sydney and Brisbane would soon run out of water, stating, “even the rain that falls isn’t actually going to fill our dams and our river systems”. In fact, in 2022, Australia’s east coast saw record-breaking rain, overflowing reservoirs and flooding rivers.²⁷

In 2010, a team from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicted that “the U.S. Southeast and the Bahamas will be pounded by more very intense hurricanes in the coming decades due to global warming,” and that the strongest hurricanes may double in frequency.²⁸ In fact, after 40 years of global warming, no increase in hurricanes has been detected.²⁹ Significantly, deaths from natural disasters in general have declined by over 90% in the last hundred years.³⁰

²³ “Working Group II Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability,” *IPCC*, <https://www.ipcc.ch/working-group/wg2/?idp=246>.

²⁴ “NASA detects drop in global fires,” *Science Daily*, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/06/170620175502.htm>.

²⁵ “Experts Predict Polar Bear Decline,” *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/06/AR2005070601899.html>.

²⁶ “Global population of polar bears has increased by 2,650–5,700 since 2001,” *Polar Bear Science*, <https://polarbears-science.com/2013/07/15/global-population-of-polar-bears-has-increased-by-2650-5700-since-2001/>.

²⁷ “Raining champs,” *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-31/australian-weather-rain-2022-records-broken-flooding/101789262>.

²⁸ “Hurricanes and Global Warming,” *National Geographic*, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/01/100121-hurricanes-global-warming/>.

²⁹ “Contiguous U.S. Extremes in Landfalling Tropical Systems,” *National Centers for Environmental Information*, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/cei/graph/us/6/01-12>.

³⁰ “Decadal average: Annual number of deaths from disasters,” *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/natural-disasters>.

In 2012, a report was published that predicted doom for the Great Barrier Reef, spawning mass media coverage.³¹ It claimed that “coral cover in the central and southern regions of the GBR is likely to decline to 5–10% by 2022” and that “the future of the GBR therefore depends on decisive action”. Headlines as recently as 2020 declared, “Half of the Great Barrier Reef’s corals have been killed by climate change”.³² In fact, in 2022, the Australian Institute of Marine Science reported that two thirds of the reef is showing record levels of coral cover,³³ with 40% more coverage than the historical maximum in 1986.³⁴

Indeed, the IPCC has used over 100 climate models to predict future temperatures. In almost every case, the models have seriously over-predicted global surface temperatures in response to rising CO₂.³⁵

3.2.2 Dishonesty and Fraud in Climate Research

An additional reason we must be cautious about climate hysteria — and sensible in our policy responses to it — is the number of frauds that have been uncovered in the field of climate research. Consider several examples.

Just weeks before the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, thousands of emails between climate scientists at East Anglia University were leaked online, exposing a scandal known as ‘Climategate’. Though the legacy press hosed down the debacle, in the

³¹ “The 27-year decline of coral cover on the Great Barrier Reef and its causes,” *PNAS*, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1208909109>.

³² “Half of the Great Barrier Reef’s corals have been killed by climate change since 1995, scientists say,” *CBS News*, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/great-barrier-reef-half-corals-died-since-1995/>.

³³ “Continued coral recovery leads to 36-year highs across two-thirds of the Great Barrier Reef,” *Australian Institute of Marine Science*, https://www.aims.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/AIMS_LTMP_Report_on%20GBR_coral_status_2021_2022_040822F3.pdf.

³⁴ “Healthy Great Barrier Reef, healthy environmental scandal,” *The Spectator Australia*, <https://www.spectator.com.au/2022/08/healthy-great-barrier-reef-healthy-environmental-scandal/>.

³⁵ “Anthropogenic Global Warming,” *Creation Ministries International*, <https://creation.com/climate-change>.

emails was proof that scientists had deliberately tampered with tree ring data to fit prior assumptions about historic global temperatures.³⁶

Soon afterwards, the infamous ‘hockey stick’ graph — a highly-influential graphic that became an icon for climate alarmists — was also exposed as fraudulent. Produced by a team led by Michael Mann of Penn State University, the graph displayed layers of data to reconstruct the last thousand years of earth’s temperature. But it had been fudged: Mann had cherry-picked data to erase the Medieval Warm Period and the Little Ice Age from the temperature record.³⁷ Mann later lost a court case over the matter and refused to pay the court-ordered costs — yet was still awarded the 2019 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement!

Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology has also been exposed for deleting high temperatures from past records. In one instance, the BOM erased Australia’s hottest day — 125°F (51.7°C) at Bourke on 3 January 1909 — claiming that it was an anomaly since neighbouring stations did not register similar temperatures.³⁸ Yet nearby Brewarrina recorded 123°F (50.6°C) for the same day. The Bureau also erased Australia’s second hottest day, where 51.1°C (124°F) was recorded at White Cliffs on 12 January, 1939. The BOM fudged the figures when digitising historic temperature records, but was exposed by then-Liberal MP Craig Kelly who uncovered the truth in the handwritten archives. In fact, the BOM has adjusted all historical temperature records (an adjustment they call ACORN-SAT) to support the warming narrative.³⁹

³⁶ “‘Climategate’ still matters – but not how the BBC thinks it does,” *The Spectator*, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/climategate-still-matters-but-not-how-the-bbc-thinks-it-does/>.

³⁷ “Michael Mann ‘Hockey Stick’ Update: Now Definitively Established To Be Fraud,” *Manhattan Contrarian*, <https://www.manhattancontrarian.com/blog/2019-8-26-michael-mann-hockey-stick-update-now-definitively-proven-to-be-fraud>.

³⁸ “Revealed: the true hottest day ever recorded in Australia,” *The Spectator Australia*, <https://www.spectator.com.au/2020/07/revealed-the-true-hottest-day-ever-recorded-in-australia/>.

³⁹ “Anthropogenic Global Warming,” *Creation Ministries International*, <https://creation.com/climate-change>.

Similar fraud has taken place in the United States. In advance of the 2015 Paris climate conference, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released a paper that altered historic climate data, eliminating a two-decade “climate change hiatus” that had been a bugbear for climate alarmists.⁴⁰ The paper’s authors were eventually found out for their dishonesty.⁴¹ NASA has been credibly accused of similar data manipulation to support the case for CO₂-driven global warming.⁴²

It is an unfortunate fact that the public remains largely unaware of the climate data that has been fraudulently manipulated and that is still used to shape public policy today.

3.2.3 A False Consensus on Climate Hysteria

The claim has long circulated that 97% of climate scientists agree humans are heating up the planet to dangerous levels. A detailed analysis of that claim found it to be severely exaggerated.⁴³

Among those who disagree are 1,400 scientists and professionals who have signed the World Climate Declaration, stating that there is no climate emergency.⁴⁴ Likewise, the Global Warming Petition Project has been signed by over 31,000 American scientists — including 9,000 with PhDs — who reject climate alarmism.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ “Yes, NOAA must adjust data — but its climate record really is quite wrong,” *The Hill*, <https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/380635-yes-noaa-must-adjust-data-but-its-climate-record-really-is-quite/>.

⁴¹ “Former NOAA Scientist Confirms Colleagues Manipulated Climate Records,” *House Science, Space, and Technology Committee*, <https://science.house.gov/2017/2/former-noaa-scientist-confirms-colleagues-manipulated-climate-records>.

⁴² “German Scientist Accuses NASA of Massive Alteration of Temperature,” *CNS News*, <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/barbara-hollingsworth/german-scientist-accuses-nasa-massive-alteration-temperature>.

⁴³ “Fact Checking The Claim Of 97% Consensus On Anthropogenic Climate Change,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/uhenergy/2016/12/14/fact-checking-the-97-consensus-on-anthropogenic-climate-change/?sh=473b6883u57>.

⁴⁴ “There is No Climate Emergency,” *World Climate Declaration*, <https://clintel.org/world-climate-declaration/>.

⁴⁵ “Global Warming Petition Project,” *Petition Project*, <http://petitionproject.org/>.

Although plenty of dissent does exist in the scientific community, one thing is certain: disagreement is no longer acceptable. Today, if you argue that CO₂ is good for the planet, that nature is largely responsible for global warming, or that climate predictions rely on inadequate modelling, you are demonised as a ‘climate denier’. Even activists and climate scientists who change their minds after a closer look at the data are smeared with this label. Most western governments and private companies simply refuse to hire scientists who reject climate orthodoxy.

Patrick Moore, who co-founded Greenpeace but has since left the organisation, agrees. He now states unequivocally that “climate alarmism is groupthink” — which he defines as “mindless adherence to a narrative” and “the enemy of science”. Former New Scientist editor Nigel Calder likewise lamented that, “The whole global warming business has become like a religion, and people who disagree are called heretics. I’m a heretic.”

Other high-profile climate dissenters include Nobel Prize-winning physicist Ivar Giaever, Australian geologist Ian Plimer, American physicist Will Happer, Japanese scientist Kiminori Itoh, the late physicist Freeman Dyson, and many more.

Though these scientists are eminently qualified, they are ostracised as apostates for having the ‘wrong opinion’ on climate science, and their professional achievements are considered null and void. They are automatically rendered non-experts. Worse, their views are often censored in the scientific community, the legacy press and on social media, allowing little room for robust debate.

Thus, when climate alarmists say there is consensus on the issue and that “the science is settled”, it is a false consensus, only made possible by silencing those who disagree.

Even if a genuine consensus on climate change did exist, scientific truth is not discovered by consensus. The ‘argument from consensus’ is a logical fallacy, and one that has hindered science at various turns through history. The Ptolemaic model of the solar system was the scientific consensus for 1,500 years, for instance, but it was wrong. Spontaneous generation, Haeckel’s recapitulation theory, Einstein’s static universe and the existence of the planet Vulcan are other examples of consensus ‘science’ that was later found to be false.

Climate science has been captured by a ruling paradigm and is now dominated by the alarmist narrative. That doesn’t make climate alarmism false — but it certainly doesn’t make it true either. And it is precisely why debate must be allowed on the subject — on social media especially.

3.2.4 Climate Change and ACMA’s Proposed Powers

All of the facts we have outlined above — namely failed predictions, fraudulent data, and a false consensus — would likely have been labelled ‘misinformation’ and silenced under the proposed ACMA powers, had those powers already been in existence.

It takes time for fraud to be exposed. It takes time for scientific predictions to be proven right or wrong. It takes time for a scientific consensus to be established or overturned. Most importantly, it requires free speech for any of this to be possible.

To censor those who suspect fraud, or believe certain predictions about the future will be proved wrong, or who dissent from the current consensus, is both illogical and unethical. Yet that is precisely what Labor’s draft bill will achieve, if it is passed into law.

There is no justification for the Commonwealth handing ACMA these dangerous powers. The proposed bill must be rejected.

3.3 Case Study Three: COVID-19

Due to our convictions about human dignity and the rights of the individual, the Canberra Declaration took a principled editorial stance against lockdowns and mandatory medical injections during the Covid era. We also reported factually about the origins of the Covid-19 virus, the exaggerations of Australia's political and media class, and the false promises of immunity via the mRNA products.

At the time, our critics derided us but our reporting and commentary has since been extensively vindicated. If ACMA had Covid-era powers like those proposed in the draft bill, we would most certainly have been censored by social media platforms eager to comply with those ACMA standards, even though we were engaging in truthful reporting.

In short, the Canberra Declaration is the 'fake news' these proposed powers would seek to silence. The dilemma is that our 'fake news' was accurate all along.

Even Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has admitted that his and other social media platforms were wrong to censor certain information during the Covid era. He explained that towards the beginning of the pandemic especially, "there hadn't been time to fully vet a bunch of the scientific assumptions and unfortunately I think a lot of the establishment... asked for a bunch of things to be censored that in retrospect ended up being more debatable or true".⁴⁶

If Meta, at the behest of agencies of sovereign nations, has already willingly censored information that later turned out to be true, we can be very confident that it and other social media platforms will do so again — especially if those agencies are given legislative coercion to do so.

⁴⁶ See <https://twitter.com/kevinnbass/status/167806541114278913>.

3.3.1 Covid-19: The Ideal Case Study

As we have intimated, one of the best ways we can assess the appropriateness of the proposed ACMA powers is to imagine them being in effect during a period of time that has already transpired. The years 2020 to 2022 provide us with an ideal example, given the contested facts surrounding Covid-19, and the wide range of public views on the response taken by Australian authorities.

Imagining that scenario, in order to comply with ACMA codes and standards and to avoid millions of dollars in fines, platforms like Facebook and Twitter would have had no choice but to censor *The Daily Declaration's* reporting. Our content would have been deemed 'misinformation' or 'disinformation' in that scenario.

Yet in the instances we highlight below, the *Daily Declaration* provided factual reporting and well-informed commentary, while the authorities — those to be made immune from the proposed powers — have since been found to have been promoting their own kinds of 'misinformation'.

On countless occasions, government ministers led Australians to believe that Covid-19 killed indiscriminately and that no one was safe from the virus. For months and even years, state premiers pursued Covid zero — an impossible goal — with reckless abandon.

Mainstream news outlets reported government dictates uncritically, amplifying an autocratic agenda. Independent news outlets like the *Daily Declaration* challenged such misguided thinking, highlighting data — even early data — showing that everyone would ultimately catch the virus and that it would prove mild for very close to 100 per cent of healthy people.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ "COVID-19 Far Less Deadly for Non-Elderly than Original Estimates: Study," *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2023/01/24/covid-19-far-less-deadly-for-non-elderly/>.

We have, of course, been vindicated. Had ACMA possessed the proposed ‘misinformation’ powers, the *Daily Declaration* would have been punished for telling the truth, while those guilty of wild exaggeration would have been granted special immunity.

3.3.2 The Great Barrington Declaration

Consider that the *Daily Declaration* expressed strong support for The Great Barrington Declaration,⁴⁸ which favoured protecting the elderly and other vulnerable populations but urged against blanket lockdowns that would predictably cause long-term social and economic devastation.⁴⁹

It soon came to light that two of the world’s most high-profile scientists, then director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Francis Collins and then director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Anthony Fauci, were colluding in private to smear and silence the authors of The Great Barrington Declaration — namely, Sunetra Gupta of the University of Oxford, Jay Bhattacharya of Stanford University, and Martin Kulldorff of Harvard University.

Specifically, Collins emailed Fauci calling these esteemed scientists “fringe epidemiologists” and urging a “quick and devastating published take down” of their ideas. Collins and Fauci were successful to that end, managing to weaponise “professional news” outlets like *The Nation* and *The Washington Post* against Gupta, Bhattacharya and Kulldorff.⁵⁰ Australia’s

⁴⁸ “The Great Barrington Declaration,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2020/10/15/the-great-barrington-declaration/>.

⁴⁹ “The cost of lockdowns exceeds the benefit, and the poor carry most of the burden,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2021/08/28/the-cost-of-lockdowns-exceeds-the-benefit-and-the-poor-carry-most-of-the-burden/>.

⁵⁰ “Fauci, Emails, and Some Alleged Science,” *American Institute for Economic Research*, <https://www.aier.org/article/fauci-emails-and-some-alleged-science/>.

national broadcaster, the ABC, followed suit, smearing The Great Barrington Declaration as promoting a “global chickenpox party”.⁵¹

Now public sentiment has shifted. Today there is widespread recognition that lockdowns were an overreaction to the threat of Covid-19 and contributed significantly to the economic downturn and compounding social problems we have experienced since.

Imagine if at the time, ACMA possessed the ‘misinformation’ powers proposed in the draft bill. Without doubt, the *Daily Declaration* would have been censored for our editorial stance, even though we have since been substantially vindicated. All independent news outlets in Australia that supported The Great Barrington Declaration would have been subject to online censorship, even though “professional news” outlets — including here in Australia — had been covertly influenced by influential figures like Collins and Fauci.

3.3.3 The False Promise of Vaccine Immunity

Another example that must be considered are the many false assurances that were given to the public about Covid-19 vaccine immunity.

In November 2020, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said, “If you don’t vaccinate, you’re becoming the weak link that will help this deadly virus replicate.”⁵²

⁵¹ “COVID chasers’ trying to catch Omicron on purpose are ‘playing Russian roulette’, experts say,” *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-16/covid-trying-to-catch-omicron-on-purpose-dangerous/100746124>.

⁵² See <https://twitter.com/TheChiefNerd/status/1638678362322350080>.

In March 2021, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky claimed, “Vaccinated people do not carry the virus... [they] don’t get sick, and that it’s not just in the clinical trials but it’s also in real-world data.”⁵³

In May 2021, NIAID Director Anthony Fauci promised, “When people are vaccinated, they can feel safe they will not be infected.”⁵⁴

In July 2021, U.S. President Joe Biden assured Americans, “You’re not going to get Covid if you have these vaccinations.”⁵⁵

In October 2021, World Economic Forum Founder Klaus Schwab said, “Nobody will be safe if not everybody is vaccinated.”⁵⁶

In January 2022, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews told Victorians, “With three doses... you’ll be prevented, not just from serious illness, but from getting this virus, this Omicron variant, and therefore giving it to others.”⁵⁷

The entire time prominent leaders were making such promises, it was evident to anyone with a modicum of curiosity that the mRNA injectables did not confer such promised immunity. People who took the Covid-19 injections were still contracting the virus, spreading it to others, being hospitalised, and even dying. Indeed, once Australians learned

⁵³ See <https://youtu.be/SQNmD3RmJ8o>.

⁵⁴ See https://youtu.be/frbL_z64o7Q.

⁵⁵ See https://twitter.com/greg_pricen/status/1550126265490763785.

⁵⁶ See <https://twitter.com/EssexPR/status/1544273335881801728>.

⁵⁷ See <https://twitter.com/grantfisher/status/1480702510390480897>.

that the mRNA products fell far short of the promises made about them, demand plummeted.⁵⁸

Once again, we have evidence that public figures were acting with duplicity — behind closed doors, admitting the Covid-19 products did not guarantee immunity even as they made public announcements claiming they did.

As we have seen, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said on MSNBC that “vaccinated people do not carry the virus, don’t get sick.” Yet thanks to an FOI request, we now know that two months prior, Walensky was hurriedly emailing her colleagues about “vaccine breakthroughs”, calling them an “important area of study,” and seeking advice on what to do in response.⁵⁹

The *Daily Declaration* reported on “vaccine breakthroughs” throughout 2021.⁶⁰ Imagine if ACMA had its proposed ‘misinformation’ powers at the time. We would have been silenced for telling the truth, while government ministers and “professional news” outlets still promising vaccine immunity would have been allowed to perpetuate their falsehoods unchallenged.

How is this in any way democratic? How can legislation like that proposed possibly be justified in light of what we learned during the Covid era?

⁵⁸ “Nearly a fifth of Australia’s Covid vaccine stock binned amid warning of fresh wave of cases,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/oct/11/nearly-a-fifth-of-australias-covid-vaccine-stock-binned-amid-warning-of-fresh-wave-of-cases>.

⁵⁹ “New Documents Reveal CDC Head Lied About ‘Vaccine Breakthroughs’,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2023/06/27/new-documents-reveal-cdc-head-lied-about-vaccine-breakthroughs/>.

⁶⁰ See “The Fallacy of Covid Vaccines and Transmission,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2021/09/01/the-fallacy-of-covid-vaccines-and-transmission/>, “The Efficacy of Mass COVID Vaccination: Myths, Lies & Facts,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2021/09/21/the-efficacy-of-mass-covid-vaccination-myths-lies-facts/>, “The Case for Vaccine Passports is Feeble and Fading,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2021/09/07/against-vaccine-passports/>.

3.3.4 A ‘Conspiracy Theory’ That Came True

In May 2020, the *Daily Declaration* published an article suggesting that SARS-CoV-2 may have originated not from nature but from the Wuhan Institute of Virology — a hypothesis also known as the lab leak theory.⁶¹

During the same period, Australia’s national broadcaster the ABC published multiple articles smearing the lab leak theory as ‘misinformation’ and a ‘conspiracy theory’ popularised by Donald Trump.⁶²

We now know from the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence that “all agencies continue to assess that both a natural and laboratory-associated origin remain plausible hypotheses to explain the first human infection”.⁶³ The lab leak theory remains the FBI’s favoured explanation for the origins of the pandemic, and one that many mainstream news outlets now support.

In other words, from the earliest days of the Covid era, the lab leak theory deserved as much attention and news coverage as the natural-origin theory. Serious journalists should have been interrogating the lab leak theory with as much gusto as they were the natural origins theory.

⁶¹ “Was the coronavirus created by Chinese scientist who tried to cover her tracks – and failed?” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2020/05/22/was-the-coronavirus-created-by-chinese-scientist-who-tried-to-cover-her-tracks-and-failed/>

⁶² See “Coronavirus may have come from a Chinese lab, if you believe Donald Trump — but experts disagree,” *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-18/coronavirus-misinformation-origin-theory-donald-trump-wuhan-lab/12158774>, “Anti-Beijing group with links to Steve Bannon spreading COVID-19 misinformation in Australia,” *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2020-10-09/anti-beijing-group-with-links-to-steve-bannon-misinformation/12735638>.

⁶³ “Potential Links Between the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the Origin of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Report-on-Potential-Links-Between-the-Wuhan-Institute-of-Virology-and-the-Origins-of-COVID-19-20230623.pdf>.

Now imagine that the proposed ACMA ‘misinformation’ powers were already in effect at the time. Any independent outlet that gave weight to the lab leak theory — such as the *Daily Declaration*⁶⁴ — would have been unjustifiably censored, even as “professional news” agencies acted with impunity in their smearing of the lab leak hypothesis as a “conspiracy theory”.

Only in an upside-down world would this absurd scenario be just — yet this is precisely the world to be created under the proposed bill.

3.3.5 False ‘Facts’ That Frightened the Public

Our writers were among the many independent voices to criticise government ministers for frightening the public with what we suspected were inflated infection and hospitalisation statistics during the Covid era.

By January 2022 it became clear that some of these numbers were indeed inflated. Even the legacy press began reporting that tens of thousands of ‘Covid patients’ had actually been admitted to hospital for unrelated ailments in NSW, only later discovering they had the virus.⁶⁵

Or consider the Therapeutic Goods Administration’s handling of Ivermectin. The nation’s peak medicines regulator, the TGA, banned Ivermectin for the treatment of Covid-19 on the flimsy premise that its availability might increase vaccine hesitancy.⁶⁶ In doing so, the Commonwealth deprived its citizens of a drug whose safety and efficacy had

⁶⁴ See also “Media Backflip: Wuhan Lab Leak No Longer a ‘Conspiracy Theory’,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2021/05/25/media-backflip-wuhan-lab-leak-no-longer-a-conspiracy-theory/>.

⁶⁵ “How hundreds of patients in hospital with Covid had NO IDEA they were infected and were admitted for other illnesses or injuries - as experts say Melbourne and Sydney will soon hit 100K daily cases,” *The Daily Mail*, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10362331/Victorias-Covid-crisis-100-000-cases-day-amid-shock-claims-NSW-hospitalisations.html>.

⁶⁶ “Who is TGA Head John Skerritt and Why Did He Ban Ivermectin?” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2021/11/05/john-skerritt/>.

already been demonstrated in dozens of peer-reviewed studies,⁶⁷ and was already being used by a quarter of the world's population in the fight against Covid-19.⁶⁸

“Professional news” outlets like the taxpayer-funded ABC peddled the lie that Ivermectin — a Nobel Prize-winning medication prescribed over 3.7 billion times since the 1980s — was “a drug used to de-worm horses and livestock”.⁶⁹ By contrast, the *Daily Declaration* reported factually on Ivermectin.⁷⁰

Finally, once a majority of Australians had taken the mRNA products, the TGA lifted its unjustified embargo on Ivermectin.⁷¹

If ACMA had already possessed the proposed ‘misinformation’ powers, the *Daily Declaration* would have been silenced on these crucial issues, while legacy outlets would have been free to peddle their false narratives.

3.3.6 Collusion Between Governments and Big Tech

To understand the damage wrought during the Covid era by government agencies working hand-in-hand with social media companies to censor speech, consider this excerpt from an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, published as recently as 7 July, 2023:

For three years, pandemic public relations mocked nature, generating fear, illness, inflation and excess death beyond what the virus caused. Digital censorship supercharged the effort to hide reality, but reality is getting its day in court.

⁶⁷ “Covid-19 Treatment Studies for Ivermectin,” *Covid Analysis*, <https://c19ivm.org/>.

⁶⁸ “Global ivermectin adoption for COVID-19”, *Covid Analysis*, <https://c19ivm.org/adoption.html>.

⁶⁹ “Audio: News in 90 Seconds, *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/newschannel/news-in-90-seconds/2021-09-03/news-in-90-seconds/13525248>

⁷⁰ See <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/?s=ivermectin>.

⁷¹ “Ivermectin Ban Lifted,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2023/05/11/ivermectin-ban-lifted/>.

On July 4, U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty temporarily blocked numerous federal agencies and the White House from collaborating with social-media companies and third-party groups to censor speech.

Discovery in *Missouri v. Biden* exposed relationships among government agencies and social-media firms and revealed an additional layer of university centers and self-styled disinformation watchdogs and fact-checking outfits.

Elon Musk's release of some of Twitter's internal files revealed that up to 80 Federal Bureau of Investigation agents were embedded with social-media companies. The agents mostly weren't fighting terrorism but flagging wrongthink by American citizens, including eminent scientists who suggested different paths on Covid policy.

The results of these relationships? Twitter blacklisted Stanford physician and economist Jay Bhattacharya for showing Covid almost exclusively threatened the elderly, severely reducing the visibility of his tweets. When Stanford health policy scholar Scott Atlas began advising the White House, YouTube erased his most prominent video opposing lockdowns. Twitter banned Robert Malone, a pioneer of mRNA vaccine technology, for calling attention to the vaccines' dangers. YouTube demonetized evolutionary biologist Bret Weinstein, who suggested the virus might be engineered and predicted vaccine-evading variants. And those are only a few examples.

Social-media platforms were powerful tools for full-spectrum censorship, but they didn't act alone. Medical schools, medical boards, science journals and legacy media sang from the same hymnal.

Legions of doctors stayed quiet after witnessing the demonization of their peers who challenged the Covid orthodoxy. A little censorship leads people to watch what they say. Millions of patients and citizens were deprived of important insights as a result.

Health authorities and TV doctors insisted young people were vulnerable, demanded toddlers wear masks, closed schools, beaches and parks, and were loath to contemplate crucial cost-benefit analysis. The economy? Mental health? Never heard of them.

These “experts” denied the protective effects of recovered immunity, a phenomenon we’ve known about since the Plague of Athens in 430 B.C. They effectively prohibited generic drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration, such as azithromycin and ivermectin, which low-income nations around the world were deploying successfully. They failed to appreciate the evolutionary dynamics of mass vaccination during a pandemic.

The U.S. government spent \$6 trillion to buoy its shuttered economy, and most people got Covid anyway. Worst of all, the lockdowns and mandates resulted in unprecedented bad health outcomes for young and middle-aged people in rich countries.

Excess mortality in most high-income nations was worse in 2021 and 2022 than in 2020, the initial pandemic year. Many poorer nations with less government control seemed to fare better. Sweden, which didn’t have a lockdown, performed better than nearly every other advanced nation.

After navigating 2020 with relative success, young and middle-age healthy people in rich nations began dying in unprecedented numbers in 2021 and 2022. Health authorities haven't focused enough on this cataclysm of premature death from non-Covid heart attacks, strokes, pulmonary embolisms, kidney failure and cancer.

Hiding these and other realities has become more difficult in the internet age. The information explosion has allowed more people to spot quickly the mistakes of officials and learn the truth. This has changed the relationship between the authorities and those they govern. Those in charge feel threatened.

Digital censorship is their response to this crisis of authority. True, misinformation is rampant online. But it was far worse before the internet, when myths could persist for centuries. New technologies allow us to compile data quickly, correct errors, find facts and dispel falsehoods. Science, supported by an open internet, is the process by which we reduce misinformation and approach the truth.

Artificial intelligence will improve our ability to sift, parse, edit, authenticate and organize information. When you hear calls to license or centralize control of AI, remember the hubris of Covid censorship.⁷²

3.3.7 Covid-19 and ACMA's Proposed Powers

Examples could be multiplied where “content that [was] authorised by the Commonwealth or a State” and “professional news content” was later proven to be false, even as independent outlets accused of ‘misinformation’ reported the truth.

⁷² “Covid Censorship Proved to Be Deadly,” *Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-censorship-proved-to-be-deadly-social-media-government-pandemic-health-697c32c4>.

The Albanese Government — the outfit presently seeking to stifle press freedoms — has claimed repeatedly that “renewables will lead to cheaper power prices”. All Australians now know better.

As we have seen, countless doomsday climate predictions have been proven wrong in time.

In a recent Senate estimates hearing, a panel of five of Australia’s top medical experts from the Department of Health, including the department’s Secretary, was unable to define what a woman is!⁷³

Examples could be multiplied. But Covid-19 provides the clearest example of a time when truthful reporting was labelled ‘misinformation’ and was censored, and when governments and “professional news” outlets offered misinformation in place of the truth.

Under the proposed ACMA ‘misinformation’ powers, Commonwealth-sanctioned voices will be given immunity, while their independent detractors will in all likelihood be silenced online for disagreeing — even when they are correct. The world imagined by the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is truly dystopian.

4.0 Conclusion

The exposure draft of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is an exercise in hubris. It divides Australia in two, insulating an elite class of journalists and government actors from the legitimate scrutiny of independent news outlets, citizen journalists and everyday Australians. The

⁷³ “Senator Alex Antic Asked ‘What is a Woman?’ and the Department of Health Couldn’t Answer,” *The Daily Declaration*, <https://blog.canberradeclaration.org.au/2022/04/07/alex-antic-what-is-a-woman/>.

proposed bill assumes that this elite class possesses omniscience and that its critics must therefore be censored. It imagines a world in which the truth is dispensed from the powers above, rather than being arrived at by a free exchange of ideas among equals.

In short, this draft bill anticipates a world in which the democratic ideals that built modern Australia — such as freedom of speech and the freedom of the press — are replaced with autocratic powers that weaponise the State against its citizens.

Citizen journalists and independent news outlets like the *Daily Declaration* sometimes get it wrong. No one has all the information at their disposal. No one has a claim to infallibility. No one has a monopoly on truth — including ACMA. And that is precisely why ACMA must not be given these proposed powers.

Everyday people should not be censored for disagreeing with the State.

The Commonwealth must continue to be held accountable by its citizens.

Freedom of speech must be preserved at all costs.

We could not be more resolute in our opposition to this abhorrent piece of legislation. Along with our over 90,000 signatories, we at the Canberra Declaration implore you to condemn the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 to the dustbin of history, where it belongs.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our submission.