



THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts

MEDIA RELEASE

21 March 2022

New disinformation laws

The Morrison Government will introduce legislation this year to combat harmful disinformation and misinformation online.

The legislation will provide the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) with new regulatory powers to hold big tech companies to account for harmful content on their platforms.

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, made the announcement of the new powers today while releasing a report by ACMA on the adequacy of digital platforms' current disinformation and news quality measures.

“ACMA’s report highlights that disinformation and misinformation are significant and ongoing issues,” Minister Fletcher said.

“Digital platforms must take responsibility for what is on their sites and take action when harmful or misleading content appears. This is our Government’s clear expectation—and just as we have backed that expectation with action in recently passing the new Online Safety Act, we are taking action when it comes to disinformation and misinformation.”

Minister Fletcher said the Government welcomed all five of the recommendations made in ACMA’s report.

ACMA will be given new information-gathering powers to incentivise greater platform transparency and improve access to Australia-specific data on the effectiveness of measures to address disinformation and misinformation.

In addition, ACMA will be given reserve powers to register and enforce industry codes or make industry standards. This will encourage platforms to be ambitious in addressing the harms of disinformation and misinformation, while providing ACMA with the ability to hold platforms to account should their voluntary efforts prove inadequate or untimely.

A Misinformation and Disinformation Action Group will be established, bringing together key stakeholders across government and the private sector to collaborate and share information on emerging issues and best practice responses.

Minister Fletcher said these measures build on the actions the Morrison Government and industry have already taken.

The Government Response to the ACCC’s Digital Platforms Inquiry Final Report indicated that the Government would ask the major digital platforms to develop a voluntary code of conduct for disinformation and news quality. The *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation* was developed by industry with oversight by ACMA.

The Code was launched in February, 2021, and commits signatories to take action to reduce the impact of

harmful disinformation and misinformation on their services.

Since receiving the report in June last year, Government has carefully considered additional measures put in place by industry to combat harmful misinformation and disinformation in relation to COVID, and more recently the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Government acknowledges the positive steps taken by industry, but believes more protections must be provided to Australians online.

The Government will consult on the scope of the new powers in the coming weeks ahead of introducing legislation into the Parliament in the second half of 2022. For more information on the report visit <https://www.acma.gov.au/report-government-adequacy-digital-platforms-disinformation-and-news-quality-measures>

Media contact:

Imre Salusinszky | 0432 535 737 | Imre.Salusinszky@communications.gov.au