

Dear Committee Members,

I am a recent year 12 graduate on my way to university next year, and I am concerned by the overreach of this bill.

Aside from rushing the legislative and consultation process, limiting submissions to two pages when I could go on for another three, it fails to properly understand the real problems of social media usage for young people, placing vulnerable under sixteen-year-olds at risk of greater harm than misinformation/disinformation or even the more perverse and real impacts of social media.

Impact of social media as a positive force for social connectivity.

This bill demonstrates the disconnect between our political class and young people who use social media. Social media platforms are key means by which we communicate amongst ourselves, with direct messaging features being a key method of remaining in contact - something that hasn't been considered in this bill.

I can attest to the social isolation I dealt with due to my staunch refusal to use any platform owned by Meta apart from WhatsApp as I had that prior to Meta's acquisition of the platform. However, the interconnectivity as a result of just finding my fellow peers' profiles and asking to friend them (as opposed to getting their number) helped restart friendships and relationships that had died as a result of time and normal changes one faces in life.

Another key benefit of social media is that the method of just finding the profile of a friend, colleague or peers instead of asking, helps those who struggle with interpersonal skills, especially for something as personal as a phone number. In my case I have connected with many friends, teachers and other people who played significant roles in my life recently. When I am too far away geographically to connect in person, this bill would force me to phone. Social media allows me to go as far back as to find people whom I had nearly forgotten about and restarting a relationship with them.

Therefore, the government, will be pushing more younger Australians into isolation by removing that easier and less socially awkward option, as well as an option that allows people to connect after years apart.

Furthermore, the government fails to realise the ability of social media to act as key method for education and an alternative media source in a country with two major parties that don't have the guts to stand up and keep the bastards who collectively own over 90% of our media landscape to account. Especially given that those same media companies will have the right to spread malicious, misleading and misogynistic information protected in law. Whilst, the demographic that is turning away from such traditional sources is being forced to accept it as an alternative. It makes one wonder why this law is really being rushed through.

Many of my fellow Young Australian Democrats also feel that these are significantly overlooked parts of the government's poor, reactionary policy designed to look like it is doing something for young Australians. When the government has done barely anything of significance over the course of this term.

Making Young Australians more vulnerable to social media/data monitoring/abuse

Prime Minister Albanese justified this move to increase social isolation under the guise of protecting young Australians when they are “going through life’s changes”. However, this bill does the opposite, it forces young Australians to cough up their ID, with no guarantee that the database it will be stored in is secure, because that has never gone wrong before (cough* Optus and Medibank data breach cough*), it doesn’t guarantee that the process of deleting data that has been tracked is easy, discouraging many from taking the necessary steps to do so amongst other means of unprecedented surveillance.

There are also far too many flexible provisions and powers in this bill that will enable, the minister and commissioner to change policy and legislation as they deem necessary with powers of expansion without new legislation. It also means that for adults they would have to give up their ID’s to big tech as well in order to continue using platforms like LinkedIn, The Metaverse, Reddit etc.

Whilst we reject this attempt to control the narrative on social media reform by claiming that the government seeks to ‘protect’ young Australians, it will isolate them further socially. Nonetheless, there are many real digital reforms the government can make to tackle social media, including:

- forcing social media companies to provide options to users to end infinite scrolling
- reducing the amount of tracking (which can in turn reduce echo chambers)
- greater control back to the user as opposed to the settings that social media companies use to keep us hooked.

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Territory Chair

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