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Senate Standing Committees on Economics
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Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Influence of International Digital Platforms

The Tech Policy Design Centre welcomes the opportunity to submit to the *Senate Inquiry into the influence of international digital platforms.*

About the Tech Policy Design Centre

The Tech Policy Design Centre (TPDC) is a nonpartisan, independent research organisation at the Australian National University. Our mission is to develop fit-for-purpose tech policy frameworks to shape technology for the long-term benefit of humanity. We work to mature the tech-governance ecosystem in collaboration with industry, government, civil society, and academia.

Algorithm transparency: Question One

TPDC's report 'Tending the Tech-Ecosystem' considered if a new regulatory body was needed to govern the tech ecosystem (as broadly defined in our report). Our research findings were informed by interviews with 32 heads and senior representatives of Australian regulators, the Australian Government, industry, and civil society, as well as an examination of international best practice. Overwhelmingly, our research found that upskilling existing regulators was the preferred base model, supported by increased funding and enhanced transparency and accountability. Applying these research findings to the specific question, the research supports upskilling Australia's existing regulators (including, but not limited to, the ACCC) to have meaningful oversight as appropriate of algorithmic transparency, rather than creating a new standalone regulatory body. Rather than creating an algorithmic regulatory silo, our research supports upskilling all existing regulators to effectively regulate algorithms. As an interim step,

there may be merit in creating a centralised centre of excellence (for example a Tech Policy Office) to develop and foster the requisite skills. Further details can be found in our report, 'Tending the Tech Ecosystem', as well as in its companion report 'Cultivating Coordination' (discussed further below).

Best Practice Tech Regulation: a model for Australia's future

Many questions in the Issues Paper touch on best practice regulation across the tech policy ecosystem. In the field of tech policy, the muscle memory for coordination-by-default does not yet exist. Too often tech policy is developed in silos, resulting in duplication, dilution of efforts, and persistent legal gaps. Due to the comparatively nascent nature of tech policy, mainstream policy coordination mechanisms (themselves in need of reform) fall short, and the siloed nature of dedicated tech policy coordination mechanisms undermines their effectiveness. For example, under the current system, despite the obvious interdependencies, cyber security proposals are led by different ministers and considered by one Australian Public Service committee, digital identity by another, and privacy separately again.

The companion report to Tending the Tech-Ecosystem, 'Cultivating Coordination', proposes a model that streamlines tech policy coordination in Australia, while uplifting the capacity of all actors in the tech ecosystem. The proposed model builds on existing coordination mechanisms, is informed by international best practice, and has been subject to extensive consultation. The model is ready for immediate implementation and is largely cost neutral. The model recommended in 'Cultivating Coordination' also aims to improve coordination with likeminded jurisdictions, as appropriate. The annex of the report also features an overview of international precedents for the model. We commend the best practice model to this inquiry.

We are at your disposal should you wish to discuss our research findings.

Warm regards,

Professor Johanna Weaver
Director of the Tech Policy Design Centre
Australian National University