A/Prof Piers Howe
Co-chair Information and Influence Hub
Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences,
University of Melbourne

Wednesday 27th October, 2024

Dear Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Re: Summary of Recommendations

As requested, I am summitting the summary of recommendations I mentioned during my testimony at the public hearing on October 16, 2024. This was part of the inquiry into civics education, engagement, and participation in Australia.

Sincerely,

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Create and regularly measure the Information Quality and Resilience Index. Without this index, evaluating society-wide interventions is impossible. While the exact subcomponents of this index will be determined in conjunction with stakeholders, it will have subcomponents designed to measure:

- the reliability and bias of information consumed by Australians across various media platforms, including traditional media
- the percentage of Australians who use social media as their primary news source
- the prevalence of disinformation, misinformation and malign influence (DMMI) in the information consumed by Australians
- the degree to which Australians are exposed to a range of opinions
- the media and information literacy of the general population.

Additionally, a taskforce should be established to improve scores on this index.

Recommendation 2. Establish a Media and Information Literacy Task Force. This will coordinate efforts across sectors, better integrate media and information literacy training into the Australian curriculum, starting at primary school, and develop community media and information literacy programs, particularly for older adults and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations, emphasizing lateral reading. It is necessary to support reliable information sources, such as public broadcasters, independent fact-checkers, disinformation registers and reliable, citizen-led, non-profit information initiatives, such as Wikipedia. People should be taught how to evaluate the credibility of these information sources on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendation 3. Improve Regulatory Frameworks and Platform Accountability.
Social media companies must provide data so that their content moderation procedures can be
verified and the integrity of the information environments on their platforms, including the
prevalence of DMMI, be measured. Sufficient data is needed to identify and map DMMI
networks that are using these platforms to inflict harm. Vetted, independent researchers need
to be granted access to the relevance estimators used by the recommendation algorithms so
that they can audit those estimators to ensure that they are not covertly coercive, biased in an
anti-social or malign manner, radicalizing, or harmful to children.

Recommendation 4. **Technological and Social Innovations:** AI systems should be
developed to identify and map DMMI networks in real-time. Voluntary identity verification
on social media must be supported. Users must be able to verify their identity without giving
private identity information to foreign companies. Identity verification must be mandatory for
accounts with a large number of followers. Australia should invest in AI-driven interventions,
such as chatbots, to reduce belief in verifiably false conspiracy theories, promote critical
thinking, and for debunking and prebunking purposes.