



Ms Lee Katauskas
Committee Secretary
Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media
Department of the Senate
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Dear Ms Katauskas

ACMA submission to the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is the independent statutory authority responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, radiocommunications and telecommunications in Australia. Our remit also covers aspects of online content regulation, including the use and promotion of gambling services and privacy protections related to unsolicited communications.

Relevantly, the ACMA maintains a register of foreign owners of media assets, which contains information about foreign stakeholders' company interests in Australian media assets. The ACMA has also been recently tasked with overseeing the development of a voluntary code on disinformation and news quality for digital platforms.

The ACMA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media's inquiry, which outlines our role in mitigating potential risks to Australia's democracy and values, including those posed by foreign actors on social media.

Foreign owners of media assets register

Under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, the ACMA is required to maintain a [register of foreign owners of media assets](#) on its website. Foreign stakeholders must notify the ACMA if they have company interests of 2.5 per cent or more in Australian media companies. The purpose of the register is to improve transparency of foreign investment in Australian media companies and enable the public to readily access and understand such information.

Voluntary code on disinformation and news quality

As a component of the [Australian Government's response](#) to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Digital Platforms Inquiry (ACCC DPI), the government has asked major digital platforms to put in place a voluntary code (or codes) of conduct for disinformation and news quality.

The government's response details that the code(s) will outline what the platforms will do to tackle disinformation on their services and support the ability of Australians to discern the quality of news and information through credibility signalling. The codes will be applicable to 'major digital platforms', including

social media platforms, and informed by international examples, such as the European Union Code of Practice on Disinformation.

The ACMA has been tasked to report to government on the adequacy of the platforms' measures and the broader impacts of disinformation by June 2021.

To assist this process and support the digital platforms, the ACMA is consulting with digital platforms, government and other relevant stakeholders to develop principles and minimum expectations for a code framework.

The ACMA notes that, once developed and implemented, the voluntary codes may have points of overlap with any responses the Committee considers and recommends through its inquiry.

Misinformation and disinformation

I note that the term 'misinformation' is used in the inquiry's terms of reference. The government's response to the ACCC DPI contemplates that voluntary codes for major digital platforms will focus on 'disinformation', which reflects international approaches to dealing with information disorder, such as the European Union Code of Practice on Disinformation. The exact definition that will be used for 'disinformation' for the purposes of the voluntary codes has not yet been settled.

For your reference, the ACCC DPI final report defined 'misinformation' as 'false or inaccurate information that is not created with the intention of causing harm'. 'Disinformation' was defined as 'false or inaccurate information deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country'. The European Union Code defines 'disinformation' as:

verifiably false or misleading information which, cumulatively,

- a) is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public; and*
- b) may cause public harm, intended as threats to democratic political and policymaking processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security.*

I hope this information may be of assistance as your inquiry progresses. The ACMA would be happy to provide additional information to the Committee as required.