

9 November 2023

BIASED “FACT-CHECKERS” SHOW HOW MISINFORMATION LAWS WILL BE A DISASTER FOR AUSTRALIA

“Throughout the referendum campaign, Australians witnessed unparalleled levels of online censorship driven by the intervention of so-called ‘fact-checkers’. It shows why the government’s proposed misinformation laws must be scrapped,” said John Storey, Director of the Institute of Public Affairs’ Legal Rights Program.

New research from the IPA of self-proclaimed ‘fact-checking’ organisations in Australia - AAP FactCheck, RMIT FactLab, and RMIT ABC Fact Check – documents the biased, unfair, and politically-motivated targeting of mainstream Australians who opposed the Voice to Parliament.

The research analysed 187 fact checks undertaken by these three organisations from the 2022 federal election up until referendum day on 14 October 2023. The research found:

- **So-called ‘fact-checkers’ published 187 fact checking articles related to the Voice – 170 of these assessments, or 91%, targeted claims of those who supported the No case.**
- **Almost every example supporting the No case were assessed to be false.** 99% per cent of assessed claims supporting the No case were deemed ‘false’, whereas only 59% of the comparatively few claims assessed supporting the Yes case were deemed ‘false’.
- **47% of the articles assessing the veracity of claims made by the Yes case were published after the Sky News exposé, the Fact Check Files.**
- **Overall, assessments were made largely on opinion rather than verifiable facts.**
- **The International Fact-Checking Network principle on “non-partisanship and fairness”, requiring signatories to “not concentrate their fact-checking unduly on any one side” was breached.**

“The biased behaviour of so-called ‘fact-checkers’ shows they cannot be trusted as the arbiters of truth in political debate. Yet the federal government’s misinformation laws will make it easier for them to shut down the opinions of mainstream Australians,” said Mr Storey.

Under the federal government’s proposed misinformation legislation, social media companies will be forced to censor ‘misinformation and disinformation’ to the satisfaction of the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

“There is little doubt foreign big tech giants will outsource their censorship obligations to the very ‘fact-checkers’ who acted so disingenuously and in such a biased manner during the referendum campaign,” said Mr Storey.

“The government’s definition of misinformation is deliberately vague so that it could be used as a weapon to censor criticism of government policy or opinion it simply does not like.”

“You cannot have a functioning democracy if one side of a debate is silenced. That’s exactly what will happen under the federal government’s proposed laws, which will supercharge online censorship and empower biased ‘fact-checkers’, who have proven they cannot be trusted to be impartial.”

To download *The Arbiters of Truth: Analysis of biased fact-checking organisations during the 2023 Voice Referendum* [click here](#).

For media and comment: Andrew Hudgson, Director of Communications, on 0404 020 896, or at ahudgson@ipa.org.au