

Australia plans huge fines if big tech fails to tackle disinformation

June 26 2023, by Kate TAN



Australia has been at the forefront of efforts to regulate digital platforms.

Tech giants could face billions of dollars in fines for failing to tackle disinformation under proposed Australian laws, which a watchdog on

Monday said would bring "mandatory" standards to the little-regulated sector.

Under the proposed legislation, the owners of platforms like Facebook, Google, Twitter, TikTok and podcasting services would face penalties worth up to five percent of annual global turnover—some of the highest proposed anywhere in the world.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority, a [government watchdog](#), would be granted a range of powers to force companies to prevent misinformation or [disinformation](#) from spreading and stop it from being monetised.

"The legislation, if passed, would provide the ACMA with a range of new powers to compel information from digital platforms, register and enforce mandatory industry codes as well as make industry standards," a spokesperson told AFP.

The watchdog would not have the power to take down or sanction individual posts.

But it could instead punish platforms for failing to monitor and combat intentionally "false, misleading and deceptive" content that could cause "serious harm".

The rules would echo legislation expected to come into force in the European Union, where [tech giants](#) could face fines as high as six percent of annual turnover and outright bans on operating inside the bloc.

Australia has also been at the forefront of efforts to regulate [digital platforms](#), prompting tech firms to make mostly unfulfilled threats to withdraw from the Australian market.

The proposed bill seeks to strengthen the current voluntary Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation that launched in 2021, but which has had only limited impact.

Tech giants including Adobe, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Redbubble, TikTok and Twitter are signatories of the current code.

The planned laws were unveiled Sunday and come amid a surge of misinformation in Australia concerning a referendum on Indigenous rights later this year.

Australians will be asked whether the constitution should recognize Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and if an Indigenous consultative body should be created to weigh in on proposed legislation.

The Australian Electoral Commission said it had witnessed an increase in misinformation and abuse online about the referendum process.

Election commissioner Tom Rogers told local media on Thursday that the tone of online comments had become "aggressive".

The government argues that tackling disinformation is essential to keeping Australians safe online, and safeguarding the country's democracy.

"Mis and disinformation sows division within the community, undermines trust and can threaten [public health](#) and safety," Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland said Sunday.

Stakeholders have until August to offer their views about the [legislation](#).

Citation: Australia plans huge fines if big tech fails to tackle disinformation (2023, June 26)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from
<https://techxplore.com/news/2023-06-australia-huge-fines-big-tech.html>

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