



# DEMOCRACY COUNTS

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Plans to further protect children from social media must include tools to navigate the current misinformation environment**

**05.08.2026**

Democracy Counts is urging the Federal Government to include measures that address the broader harms of social media in legislation to strengthen the under-16s social media ban.

Democracy Counts, a new civil society campaign convened by McKinnon to protect democracy in Australia, has told a parliamentary inquiry on the Online Safety Amendment Bill that they must consider policies to equip young people to navigate the modern information environment.

The submission also calls on the government to implement stronger accountability and regulatory mechanisms, underpinned by transparency for regulators and the public.

“A long-term, decades-long policy vision is needed to both redress current harms, and also safeguard from future digital threats,” said Democracy Counts campaign director, Tom Mooney.

“Without transparency for regulators and the public, none of the policy areas can be meaningfully enacted.

“As Squiz Media founder and managing director, Claire Kimball said, the Under-16’s ban is ‘the fence around the swimming pool’, it must be complemented with ‘swimming lessons’ - tools to help children navigate social media more safely.

“To address the harms caused to children, such as misinformation, polarisation and radicalisation, the government needs to consider greater investments in civics education and digital media literacy, as tools to help children navigate the modern information environment more safely,” said Mr Mooney.

“Civics education builds a stronger democracy. It builds a generation that understands our democratic guardrails and can think critically about what they see online.

“It equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle harms of misinformation and support their future civic participation.



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“High-quality civics education needs to go beyond building knowledge through the traditional classroom approach.

“Civics education must not just include teaching but also *showing* what effective civic participation looks like in practice, like engaging with community.

“Younger voters and those on the cusp of voting receive most of their information through social media and are therefore, being fed a diet of highly polarised opinion and outright disinformation.

“It’s time to deliver compulsory civics education and media literacy in our schools so young people coming onto the electoral roll understand how our democracy works and can develop a critical, analytical approach to what they read and see on social media.”

McKinnon’s The State of Australian Democracy report revealed 85% of Australians support more civics education.

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