



JOINT STATEMENT

Australia's democracy needs a Digital Duty of Care

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Experts in digital rights, political transparency, media freedom and education policy call on all federal parliamentarians to support the establishment of a Digital Duty of Care.

By prioritising extreme and polarising content to keep users engaged, algorithms funnel people into silos and echo chambers.

This is sowing division, undermining social cohesion and making it harder for citizens to participate constructively in our democracy.

Social media corporations that profit from Australians should be subject to basic rules and standards, just like any other businesses.

The Digital Duty of Care would allow Australians to take back some control of what they see on social media from algorithms designed to keep eyes glued to screens.

Better rules for digital platforms can create a better internet experience for everyone.

The Democracy Counts Campaign:

- welcomes the removal of the broad ministerial discretion contained in the exposure draft, a concern expressed by members of its campaign alliance.
- Supports the establishment of a private right of action against social media companies – empowering Australians to take action rather than relying only on the regulator.
- Calls on the Australian Government to address the significant threat AI-generated deepfakes poses to electoral integrity, as flagged by the Australian Electoral Commission, and invest in education and campaigns to improve the digital literacy of Australians of all ages.

In the immediate term, Parliament must pass the Digital Duty of Care legislation for the safety of social media users and the health of Australia's democracy.

Quotes from participating organisations:

Tom Mooney – Director, Democracy Counts

"Australians deserve the same basic protections from social media platforms as we expect from any other business we deal with. Social media companies are profiting from our attention and our data, but unlike media, food, banking and other industries, there are no basic rules for social media platforms. We should be able to connect online without constantly being scammed, fed fakes or vulnerable people left to fend for themselves and a Digital Duty of Care will put some basic rules in place to make sure social media companies keep their platforms safe."

Peter Greste – Executive Director, Alliance for Journalists' Freedom

"Our democracy depends on the integrity of our information system and the public debate it informs. We have already seen the damage that an unregulated digital ecosystem can do to our community, and we cannot let that continue. We need to act to make sure that the platforms serve us rather than the unelected and unaccountable technocrats who run them."

Caitlin Reiger – CEO, Human Rights Law Centre

"For too long, big tech platforms have been allowed to operate in Australia with little accountability. With power comes responsibility. The proposed duty of care is an important step forward to ensuring people can connect with their community and stay safe both online and offline. Big tech must be held to a high standard, to protect users' safety while safeguarding our rights to freedom of expression, privacy, and to be treated with dignity and respect."

Tom Sulston – Head of Policy, Digital Rights Watch

"We all deserve to use the internet to help us live our lives to the fullest. But large digital corporations harm Australians when they exploit our attention and our privacy for profit. Digital platforms harm us not only as individuals, when they feed us AI slop and hate speech through our social media feeds, but they also harm us collectively, as their influence over our information systems makes our democracy more fragile. We need the Digital Duty of Care to protect us from predatory corporations, to help us to build a thriving and diverse digital environment, and to make spaces where we can all participate as equals online."

Chanel Contos – Founder and CEO, Teach Us Consent

"Young people are being bombarded with harmful content by design and for profit, and it's time we had laws that hold tech companies to account for this. The Digital Duty of Care is a vital first step, but its effectiveness will come down to enforcement. Giving Australians the right to sue tech companies directly, and a clear path to redress, will do far more than fines alone."

Ashleigh Streeter-Jones – CEO, Raise Our Voice

"Young people aren't asking to be excluded from digital spaces. They're asking for those spaces to be safer. Through Raise Our Voice in Parliament, we've heard young Australians call for greater accountability, stronger protections and meaningful action from the platforms shaping their online experiences. The question now is whether those with the power to act are listening."

Cat Rodie – Founder, School News Project

"Young people are often described as digital natives; they have grown up with social media - but we have a responsibility to ensure the online world is a place where they can flourish. It is unfathomable that digital platforms profiting from 'rage bait' algorithms have not already been held to account."

"Media literacy educators have been fighting an uphill battle; social media corporations must help

clean up the mess they have created. The Digital Duty of Care bill will play a critical role in ensuring they do."

Naomi Nicholas – Director of Partnerships & Impact, Cool.org

"At Cool.org, we enable young people to exercise their agency and shape a better future. But we cannot ask them to make change without protecting the democratic systems that enable it. A healthy democracy depends on a safe and trustworthy information ecosystem. A Digital Duty of Care helps ensure those profiting from our attention take responsibility for preventing harm, rather than leaving that burden to those experiencing it.

Emma Cooney – Co-Director, Protocol Policy Lab

"Technology has become an integral aspect of our lives. And yet, many of us see and feel the harms stemming from current platform design, ranging from social media addiction to social fragmentation. The Digital Duty of Care is the most effective way to address harmful and addictive design features that platforms have little incentive to remove on their own."

Business Educators Australasia

"Our students deserve safe, healthy digital environments for learning and democratic participation. Civics and citizenship education, alongside media and digital literacy, equips students to engage critically and constructively. These efforts must be matched by a Digital Duty of Care that holds platforms accountable for harms affecting students and the wider community, including how their systems amplify harmful content."

John Pane – Chair, Electronic Frontiers Australia

"Australia's Digital Duty of Care Bill is essential to breaking the stranglehold of Big Tech's surveillance-based business model on our society. Rather than placing safety burdens on individuals or relying on failed self-regulation, it forces platforms to proactively mitigate demonstrable risks and harms. And by targeting engagement-driven algorithms, it holds companies accountable for prioritizing profit over user safety. With its passage the Bill will protect vulnerable groups and make digital spaces safer and healthier."

Elfa Moraitakis – CEO, SydWest

"Digital platforms shape our public conversation, and they must share responsibility for its health. A Digital Duty of Care is an important step towards protecting Australians from harmful online practices and strengthening the trust and social cohesion on which our democracy depends."

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About Democracy Counts

Democracy Counts is an alliance of organisations and Australians who care about the way democracy functions in Australia. We are calling for common sense reforms to protect our democracy: better civics education, investment in public interest journalism, political donation reform, ending the revolving door between lobbying and politics, and making online platforms better for citizens.

The growing alliance of more than 65 organisations includes the Centre for Public Integrity, Digital Rights Watch, the Local and Independent News Association, and the Alliance for Journalists' Freedom. Democracy Counts is powered by McKinnon, an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to better governments for a stronger Australia.