



Australian
Press Council



Submission on the

Draft Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation

November 2020

Address: Level 6, 53 Berry Street, North Sydney 2060 **Phone:** (02) 9261 1930 or 1800 025 712 **Fax:** (02) 9267 6826

Email: info@presscouncil.org.au **Web:** <http://www.presscouncil.org.au>

The Australian Press Council plays an important role in maintaining a free and responsible press, and in promoting responsible journalism. It has an interest in the development of a voluntary code of practice on disinformation and news quality that was agreed by the Government in its Roadmap in response to the ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry.

While the Press Council's publisher membership does not currently encompass digital platforms, the Press Council is highly conscious of the increasing role the platforms play in disseminating news and other public interest journalism and of the challenges this raises for ensuring that those relying on the platforms can discern the quality and credibility of the information they receive.

The Press Council is not in a position to provide detailed comments on the Draft Code issued by the Digital Industry Group Inc. in October 2020 or the associated Discussion Paper prepared by the UTS Centre for Media Transition. But the Press Council is particularly interested in the pro-active steps needed to pursue Objective 4 in DIGI's Draft Code which refers to enabling 'users to make more informed choices about the source of news and factual content that concerns matters which might cause harm'.

The Press Council notes that DIGI's proposed Objective 4 is narrower than the second objective in the ACMA position paper, *Misinformation and News Quality on Digital Platforms in Australia*, released in June 2020 to guide the Code's development. ACMA's second objective is about 'empowering users to identify the quality of news and information'. DIGI's Draft Code, of course, takes a narrower view more generally than the ACMA paper by focusing only on 'disinformation' and not the broader question of 'misinformation and news quality'. The Press Council's preference is for the Code to reflect ACMA's recommended broader approach.

In section 6.2 of the Draft Code a list is set out of examples of measures that might be adopted under the Code. Of particular interest to the APC are the references to 'partnerships with third-party organisations', 'prioritising credible and trusted news sources' and 'editorial and curation processes'. The ACMA paper also says (Position 4) that it expects 'the code will commit signatories to facilitate research, share relevant data, and undertake associated activities to improve understanding of misinformation in Australia' and that '[platforms] should consider ongoing avenues of collaboration between signatories, government, academia and other experts, and other relevant industries'.

The Press Council believes there is considerable potential benefit in understanding further how some form of partnership between the signatories could operate in relation to the Press Council given the Press Council's role in setting the principles and standards that its publisher members commit to, in ensuring independent complaints handling and in promoting high standards of journalism. Membership of the Press Council is already accepted as an indicator of adherence to quality news and journalism through the

Government's policies on bargaining between publishers and platforms and on financial assistance for regional producers of public interest journalism.

The Press Council would welcome further consultation on these matters as the Code is further developed and when a final Code is implemented.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Pender". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Pender

Executive Director