

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 19 February 2021

Global chorus condemn Facebook's news ban as fake news circulates online

Civil society groups from across the globe are concerned Facebook's news ban will damage Australia's democracy, as 'fake news' is able to be freely posted on the platform.

[An open letter condemning Facebook's move to block Australian news access](#) and demanding the social media giant reverse the decision has garnered signatures both locally and internationally.

"On Thursday morning, Facebook essentially wiped Australia's collective newsfeed of any kind of any local content - whether it was the Betoota Advocate or The Spectator," said Chris Cooper, executive director of Reset Australia, which launched the open letter late on Thursday.

"Facebook didn't just wipe Australian news. It also silenced the voices of Australia's civil society - from charities, unions, even political parties. This has serious consequences for democracy."

Mr Cooper said the move had already directly interfered with elections, with the West Australian opposition leader losing Facebook page less than a month from the state election.

Compounding the loss of news was the ability of misinformation. Initial research work by Reset Australia found Australians could still post COVID-19 misinformation from 'fake news' websites, even though Facebook was marking it as false.

"Facebook blocking news in the middle of a pandemic, when accurate information is a key plank of the public health response really tells you all you need know about how much Zuckerberg cares about Australian society and cohesion.

"Facebook is basically telling Australians that rather than participate meaningfully in regulatory efforts, it would prefer to operate a platform in which real news has been abandoned or de-prioritised, leaving misinformation to fill the void."

Reset Australia has been campaigning for a live list mechanism, which would see the platforms compelled to list the most viral content about COVID-19. This list could be used by academics, journalists and public health officials to track misinformation.

"A live list would allow us to see the scale of misinformation online. With reliable, accurate information effectively blocked on Facebook right now it is more necessary than ever."

"For years Facebook has claimed it's just a bystander to what happens on its platforms - but then, in I think the world's largest ever digital tantrum, it truly spat the dummy and has shown that it actively controls and manipulates what we see.

"Globally it is clear new rules are needed for Big Tech, there is no doubt about that. As a society we need to be able to harness new technology for the greater good and not purely for someone's profit.

"Social media has reached the point now where it doesn't matter if you use it or you don't, you are impacted in some way or another by what happens online."

Further comment: Chris Cooper 0403 353 621

More info: Suze Metherell 0412 867 084