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## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Administration of the Referendum into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice**

### **Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration Finance and Public Administration References Committee**

Google Australia thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide the following information to support its Inquiry into the Administration of the Referendum into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. As the first referendum in Australia to be held in the digital age, we are proud to play a role in supporting this important democratic process.

Google's work on the referendum is informed by our [company's mission](#) to make the world's information universally accessible and useful, and administered through Google's [global elections program](#) which supports democratic processes around the world by [engaging voters](#), [protecting elections](#), and [equipping campaigns](#).

In Australia, Google works closely with the Australian Electoral Commission, State and Territory electoral commissions, the e-Safety Commissioner, elected officials, political parties, campaigns, regulators, government departments and agencies, and security and intelligence agencies to support democratic processes. Further information about how Google supported the most recent federal election is available [here](#).

### **Connecting Australians with authoritative information**

We know that in the lead up to the referendum, Australians need useful and relevant information to help them navigate the process and make informed choices. We'll be exploring different ways we can surface and connect Australians to relevant authoritative information through our platforms, including Search and YouTube. This will include official information on the AEC website, and any government websites (eg [.gov.au](#) sites) which may serve as primary information portals for official resources like the pamphlet. We welcome further input from Government on the appropriate websites to surface for this purpose, as more information becomes available.

We are in close contact with a range of stakeholders and have provided briefings on our elections program and our approach to the referendum more broadly. This includes outreach to the AEC, parliamentarians, and campaign teams, covering our approach to the referendum, tools and services available to use on our platforms, such as YouTube and Google Ads, our content policies, and how to report any issues they see online. We provide a range of written resources to stakeholders, including our quick-start guide, a sample of which is included in the Appendix, together with links to our online training programs. We provide briefings on request to parliamentarians, government and agencies.

### **Tackling misinformation and disinformation together**

Google has a long history of partnering with governments, organisations, industry and community groups to tackle misinformation and disinformation. Google was one of the first signatories to the [Australian Code of Practice on Misinformation and Disinformation](#) and our [Annual Transparency Report](#) provides an overview of our efforts. In the context of the referendum, we're working with campaign teams and other civil organisations to help everyone understand digital best practices and their responsibilities when using our platforms and services.

At Google, we strictly enforce our policies that are designed to help prevent harmful content on our platforms and services including ads. On YouTube, for instance, we have strict [policies](#) governing all content on the platform, including [election misinformation](#) and [hate speech](#). Similarly, our Google Ads [policies](#) prohibit content that is harmful to users and the overall advertising ecosystem, including inappropriate content. We use a combination of automated tools and people to enforce our policies by removing violative content quickly.

We use these same tools to [reduce](#) recommendations of borderline content and potentially harmful information and raise up authoritative sources of information. For instance, on YouTube we work hard to ensure our search and recommendation systems provide content from authoritative sources when users are searching for information where veracity and credibility are key, such as news and politics. We also have dedicated product features such as the Top News shelf, which features relevant videos from authoritative news sources. YouTube CEO Neal Mohan explains the rationale behind this approach to tackling misinformation in this [blog](#).

Our Threat Analysis Group and Trust & Safety teams work to monitor malicious actors around the globe, disable their accounts, and remove the content that they posted – including but not limited to operations that may affect Australia. We provide monthly updates about our actions against coordinated influence operation campaigns in our Threat Analysis Group [blog](#). Our [submission](#) to the Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media provides further detail on our efforts in this regard.

People can report content they believe violates our policies [here](#) and lodge legal complaints at [g.co/legal](https://g.co/legal).

### **Helping voters better understand the advertising they see**

Our [ad policies](#) apply to all advertisers. This includes our [election ads](#) and [misrepresentation](#) policies. On 17 April 2023 we [announced](#) that our election ads policy, which includes a requirement for advertiser verification and disclosure of ad creative, spend and impressions on our political ads transparency report, will also apply to referendum advertising.

To provide a higher level of ads transparency and advertiser accountability we have recently launched the [Ads Transparency Centre](#) to provide users with easy access to information about the ads they see from Google. Users will be able to search by advertisers and ad domain and see an advertiser's name, location and ad creatives for Google Ads that ran in the last 30 days (non-political ads) or in the last 7 years for political ads. Further information on the Ads Transparency Centre can be found [here](#).

We're constantly exploring new ways to support Australians and the integrity of Australia's electoral processes, and we'll continue to share updates about our work on the referendum via our [blog](#). In the meantime, we will continue to liaise with parliamentarians, the AEC, government departments and agencies, campaigns, and other stakeholders.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

## APPENDIX

### Google and YouTube for Campaigning - Sample Quick Guide

*The following is a sample of tools and resources provided to campaigns, elected officials, government agencies, to assist them with matters related to product and content issues.*

#### Legal Issues

- Report at [g.co/legal](https://g.co/legal) - select product your request relates to and follow the prompts.

#### Key Content Guidelines

- [Content policies for Google Search](#)
- [Google Ads policies](#)
- [YouTube Community Guidelines](#)

#### Account Recovery

- [How to recover your Google Account or Gmail](#)
- [Tips to complete account recovery steps](#)
- [Secure a hacked or compromised Google Account](#)
- [Can't sign in to your Google Account](#)

#### YouTube

[YouTube Community Guidelines](#) determine what is allowed on YouTube, in addition to local laws. Candidates and campaigners must comply with the guidelines, including (but not limited to):

- [General misinformation](#)
- [Election misinformation policy](#)
- [COVID-19 misinformation](#)
- [Impersonation policy](#)

If content on YouTube is found to be violative, action is taken according to our longstanding [strikes system](#). Always ensure your content meets the [YouTube Community Guidelines](#) to avoid penalties.

#### Political Advertiser Verification

- [Election advertising verification \(includes referendum advertising\)](#)
- [Political content - Advertising Policies Help](#)
- [Report an ad/listing](#)
- [Find an ad's click string - Google Ad Manager Help](#)
- [Australian political transparency report](#)
- [Political Advertising](#)

- [Transparency Report FAQs](#)
  - [Download content from the report](#)
  - [share a specific report on social media](#)
  - [provide feedback](#) on the report

If Google changes the way it reports the data it will be disclosed on [this change log](#).

### **How to report YouTube content**

[Report YouTube content](#) including:

- [Report a video](#)
- [Report a playlist](#)
- [Report a thumbnail](#)
- [Report a link](#)
- [Report a comment](#)
- [Report a live chat](#)
- [Report a channel](#)
- [Report an ad](#)
- [Report a privacy issue](#)
- [Report moment or death or critical injury content](#)

### **Google Ads**

- [Report an ad](#) (on Google Search, YouTube, or display advertising)
  - [how to find an ad's click string](#)

### **Privacy and Security**

- [Privacy Checkup](#)
  - Review key settings & the data Google uses to personalise your experience
- [Security Checkup](#)
  - Secure your data & devices, add extra protections & check security events.
- [Password Manager](#)
  - Built into Chrome; no need to generate multiple new passwords.
  - Access all your accounts automatically across multiple devices
- [Password Checkup](#)
  - Checks the strength and security of all of your saved passwords and provides personalised, actionable recommendations when needed.
- [2-Step Verification](#)
  - Recommended for all accounts
- [Project Shield](#)
  - Google's free program to protect your website from DDOS attacks.
- [Advanced Protection Program](#)
  - Google's highest level of security for political offices, journalists & activists
- [Threat Analysis Group](#)
  - monitoring and transparency of state-backed attacks

