

## SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE AI IN AUSTRALIA: a submission

1. We are writing in response to the public invitation, by the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science and Resources, for submissions in response to its June 2023 Discussion Paper, *Safe and Responsible AI in Australia*.
2. In general, we commend to you The Ethics Centre's publication, *Principles for Good Technology* which is attached to this submission. The paper offers arguments in support of a generic ethics framework that is intended to apply to all forms of technology – of which AI is one form.
3. That said, a number of the examples considered in the text are directly concerned with the development and application of AI. It is worth noting that the Centre's approach seeks to encourage:
  - Innovation giving rise to a diverse range of technologies,
  - The incorporation of core values and principles at the earliest point of design and development,
  - The use of technology (such as blockchain) to track the ethical provenance of all AI systems, tools and platforms; including: the identification of core values and principles embedded in the technology, any changes to the original design and function of the technology, etc.
  - Ongoing assurance that the 'ethical restraints' embedded in the technology have been maintained (or enhanced) – with the assurance being provided by disinterested, expert third parties.
4. Beyond the general principles of the proposed framework, there is one specific suggestion that we would especially commend. It is that Australia establish an agency that provides, in the case of AI, robotics and related technologies, the same degree of protection afforded by the Therapeutic Goods Authority (TGA) for pharmaceuticals. In a similar manner, we think it important that new technologies (devices, systems, etc.) only be released to the public if they are proven to be both safe and effective.
5. A new regulatory authority could help to build public trust in new technologies and prevent some of the more dystopian fictions from becoming real. Importantly, with the evolution of blockchain, etc. we have the technical tools available to create a system of regulation that can also make good use of the assurance skills to be found in the private sector. As such, there is an opportunity to 'shape' the environment from the moment of initial design to ultimate deployment in a way that best serves the public interest ... without limiting the scope for innovation.
6. This last point is important, while it is prudent for society to establish core principles that inform the development of AI and related technologies, we should avoid ever specifying the form in which those principles should be given practical effect. Rather, novel approaches should be encouraged – with the onus being placed on developers to demonstrate how, in each case, the core ethical requirements have been realised.
7. We have not sought to address in this submission specific use cases. As the attached publication demonstrates, the core principles that we advocate need to be applied with a concern for the specific issues arising in each use case.

8. Finally, we observe that the considerable good that might flow to society through the widespread adoption of AI will only be available to the extent that society trusts that the 'ethical infrastructure' is robust enough to ensure that the burdens and benefits of transformation are equitably distributed.
9. Australian governments invest liberally in technical and physical infrastructure. They invest almost nothing in 'ethical infrastructure' – which underpins, builds and maintains trust in our core institutions. Wherever 'ethical infrastructure' is weak even the most innovative technologies produce sub-optimal outcomes. This is not because the technology lacks the power to effect change but because a distrustful society will refuse to countenance the social reforms upon which it depends for its full application. Deep down society knows that:

*Technical mastery divorced from ethical restraint is at the root of all tyranny.*



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