



Canberra Declaration

Protecting our Australian Values

14 February, 2018

Please Protect Religious Freedom in Australia

Dear Members of the Expert Panel of the Religious Freedom Review,

This submission is made by the **Canberra Declaration** which to date has been signed by 78,811 Australian citizens. We make this submission mindful that on 15 September 2017, during the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, the Prime Minister assured voters that *“religious freedom is fundamental and it will be protected in any bill that emerges from this Parliament”*.

Under the heading ‘**Religious Freedom**’ the [Canberra Declaration](#) states that *“religious freedom includes freedom of conscience and freedom of belief. The importance of these freedoms is shown in countries where they are threatened or absent. ... We affirm the basic necessity of freedom of conscience, having the liberty to speak publicly about one’s faith and beliefs, the right to practise the religion of one’s choice and the right to change one’s religious beliefs ... In Australia today these freedoms are being restricted by laws which have the potential to lead to unintended and unacceptable consequences. These laws include anti-discrimination legislation, hate crime laws and legislation on religious and sexual vilification.”*

Australia flourishes as one of the most free societies in the world. This is in stark contrast to what we see today in other parts of the world where **religious freedom is increasingly under assault**. It is a modern-day reality that Christians and other religious minorities in many countries face harassment, persecution and even genocide simply because of what they believe.

Sadly, here in Australia our religious freedoms, based on the Judeo-Christian belief system, are increasingly under attack. Over the years, they have been steadily undermined and eroded as in other Western nations. For example, in Canada, where same-sex 'marriage' has been legal since 2005, *“the freedoms of speech, press, religion and association have suffered greatly due to government pressure”* www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14899 .

Dr Timothy George, a respected Christian thinker and academic in America and the executive editor of Christianity Today, claims that *“Freedom of religion precedes, and is the basis of other freedoms ... freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to petition the government with a grievance.”*

If we maintain that such erosion of freedoms could never take place in Australia, we only have to look at what is now taking place in the Northern Territory. Its Labor-led government is proposing changes to their anti-discrimination legislation which would ‘modernise’ the language in the Act. This means removing so-called offensive language, such as the terms ‘*man*’ and ‘*woman*’. It was also recently reported that the Labor majority plan to remove the right of faith-based schools and places of worship to hire staff on the basis of their ethos.

The exemptions of the **Marriage Amendment (Definition and Religious Freedoms) Bill 2017** for the tiny segment of the population who already officiate at wedding ceremonies is totally inadequate and token to the extreme. Religious freedom in regard to marriage goes far beyond who must

Freedom, Truth, Human Dignity, Justice & Compassion

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officiate a wedding ceremony. We implore the Expert Panel to recommend provisions for the protection of the following freedoms for all Australians - not just for professional clergy.

- **Freedom for individuals to speak publicly** about man-woman marriage without governments and agencies taking punitive action;
- **Freedom of parents and faith-based schools to raise and educate children** in accordance with their moral and religious convictions;
- **Freedom of wedding service providers to withhold services** as a matter of conscience;
- **Freedom of religious charities to hold their view of marriage** without fear of losing government funding or charitable status, and
- **Freedom of faith-based schools and other institutions to hire staff** in accordance with their ethos.

We are particularly concerned for the freedom of parents to raise and educate their children in accordance with their moral convictions and religious beliefs. A serious threat in this regard is the Marxist-inspired Safe Schools Coalition Australia program that indoctrinates children with a radical and godless sexual ideology known as Queer Theory. The so-called 'Safe Schools' overrides freedoms even further by influencing school children to question and even change their gender without parental knowledge or permission.

What could happen in Australia is shown in a recent court case from Canada. On 24 November 2017, a Christian father, Dr Steve Turloukis lost his appeal in a parental rights case to protect his children from possible LGBTQ indoctrination at school. This costly battle which began in 2010 pitted him against his public school board, the province of Ontario, and the Teachers' Union.

The Religious Freedom Review has the opportunity to stem what seems to be a growing lack of acceptance and appreciation of religious freedom in Australian society. The loss or further erosion of our religious freedoms would be a national tragedy for it is religious freedom, and the many other freedoms which flow from it, that has made Australia a great place to live.

We therefore urge the Expert Panel to vigorously recommend for the protection and promotion of religious freedom in Australia. It is only as we continue into the future as a free society that Australia can remain a great place to live and *'the land of the fair go'*. Beyond that, we as a free Australia can play our part as a powerful and positive influence on the nations of the world. For, as the Canberra Declaration notes, ***"police states and totalitarian nations inevitably begin with the curtailment of basic liberties, including religious freedom and the right to speak one's mind and conscience"***.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

David Rowsome

for the Canberra Declaration Team & Community

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