

# National Human Rights Consultation Submission

AGWW-7NPRAN

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**Submission Text:**

Submission to Enquiry on Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century

Freedom of Association

Australians have always enjoyed the freedom to associate with whomever they desire, and to exclude from their associations anyone who was inappropriate to that association. To remove this freedom of choice on the basis of discrimination or equality is to remove rights that have been fundamental to the exceptional peace and harmony enjoyed by the Australian community. I am strongly opposed to any law that removes the right of a person or group of people to choose whom they wish to associate with – whether that choice be made on the basis of gender, age, or religious belief or any other criterion. People are (or should be) all equal before the law – but we are not all the same. For example, it would be inappropriate for a doctor of medicine to seek membership of a society of engineers. No-one doubts the intellectual ability of the doctor, but he/she is not an engineer! Similarly, it would be inappropriate for a man to seek membership of the Mother's Union. He may have the best interests of the organisation at heart, but he is not a mother!

Freedom of Expression

Australia has enjoyed an enviable record of freedom of religious expression and religious harmony. Our laws have allowed for the free pursuit of, discussion of, and comment upon religious beliefs and practises of any Australian citizen. However, the Victorian Racial and Religious Vilification Act removed some of these freedoms - resulting in unprecedented UNJUST persecution of two members of a religious group. Although the accusations made against these two men were eventually dismissed, they were subjected to intense emotional and financial distress which could not have occurred without this law designed to protect religious expression. This Act has proved that laws designed to protect certain people groups from persecution and discrimination can be used just for that exact purpose against others. I am strongly opposed to any law that removes the right of a person or group of people to speak what they believe – both publicly and in private conversation – without fear of being prosecuted for their convictions.

National Human Rights Legislation

There was no need to enact legislation in Australia to align with UN Treaties which were designed to provide freedom for citizens in those countries where flagrant violations of human rights were (and still are) occurring. Under Australian law prior to our ratification of all these UN Treaties, we enjoyed ALL the freedoms that the treaties were drafted to provide people with! Every Australian citizen had freedom to do and say whatever he/she chose unless it caused harm to another citizen/group. If any person/group was aggrieved by the statements/activities of another, they could take their grievance to the justice system for a decision. National Human Rights Legislation seeks to spell out what areas or grounds for grievance (i.e. rights) are important or valid to the exclusion of others. In fact these laws do exactly what they are supposed to curb – they discriminate! A good example of the abuse of such laws/rights has been provided above under "Freedom of Expression" item. Such legislation is superfluous, and can be counterproductive and for these reasons I am strongly opposed to it.

## Religion

Australians have always been free to practise their religious convictions without fear of opposition or persecution. This freedom includes being able to choose their employees and associates on the basis of shared beliefs. This freedom of choice for both individuals and groups has fostered harmony in our community, because everyone agreed that being equal as persons did not equate with being the same doctrinally. To impose equality as persons as a higher order right than freedom of choice on the basis of conviction can only lead to disharmony, distress and eventually conflict in religious organisations. This will weaken the social and welfare structure of our nation.

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