

## Statement from Faith Leaders

19<sup>th</sup> November 2021

We are grateful that the Government has engaged in extensive consultations with a diverse group of faith leaders in relation to the latest draft of the Religious Discrimination Bill. This consultation is appropriate, given that any such Bill will necessarily have a significant effect upon people of faith and the religious bodies and organisations which they have established.

As recognised by the Ruddock Review, protections against religious discrimination at a federal level are long overdue. Faith leaders would welcome the introduction of substantive protections for people of faith against faith-based discrimination. Such protections are needed because federally there is at present little if any legislative protection against discrimination directed at a person based on their religious identity and belief, and there are inconsistencies in the manner in which States and Territories have addressed the issue, if at all. This is in contrast to the existence of Federal legislation which protects against discrimination based on certain other attributes.

Although we have not seen the Bill, we understand from our discussions with the Government that some of the measures present in earlier exposure drafts have been removed, such as the protections against employer codes of conduct that restrict religious speech outside the workplace, and the conscience protection for healthcare professionals. We would have preferred that these protections had been retained in some form.

Based on what we have been informed will be the contents of the Bill, we welcome this Bill because it will protect people of faith from discrimination on the basis of their religious beliefs, and will allow faith-based organisations to act in accordance with their doctrines, tenets and beliefs without this being disallowed as religious discrimination.

Human rights legislation of the kind that is envisaged should be subject to periodic review. We will monitor the effect of any legislation that may be enacted, and will readily co-operate with the government in any review process to optimise the benefits of the legislation for all Australians.

With the more controversial measures reportedly having been removed from the Bill, there appears to be no sensible reason for it to generate a deeply polarising debate over religion. If the reports about the key provisions of the Bill are correct, it will deserve bipartisan support.

For media enquiries, contact Russell Powell: 0411692499, [rpowell@anglicanmedia.com.au](mailto:rpowell@anglicanmedia.com.au).

Signed,

The Most Rev.  
Peter A Comensoli  
Archbishop of Melbourne  
Chair, Bishops Commission for  
Life, Family and Public  
Engagement  
Australian Catholic Bishops  
Conference



Peter Wertheim AM  
co-Chief Executive Officer  
Executive Council of  
Australian Jewry



Bilal Rauf  
Spokesperson and Advisor  
Australian National Imams  
Council



The Rt Rev. Dr Michael Stead  
Diocesan Registrar  
Bishop of South Sydney  
Anglican Diocese of Sydney



The Most Rev.  
Kanishka Raffel  
Archbishop  
Anglican Diocese of Sydney



Hussein Faraj  
United Shia Islamic Foundation



The Rev. Mark Wilson  
National Ministries Director  
Australian Baptist Ministries  
(Baptist Union of Australia Inc.)



Dr Marshall Ballantine-Jones  
Executive Director  
New South Wales Council of  
Churches Executive

**NSW Council of Churches**  
ADVANCING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay  
Maronite Bishop of Australia  
Maronite Eparchy of  
Australia



Peter Phillips  
Moderator  
Presbyterian Church of  
Victoria



The Rev. Dr Philip Strong  
Moderator  
Presbyterian Church of  
Queensland



Adrian Lamrock  
Moderator  
Presbyterian Church of  
Australia in NSW & ACT



His Grace Bishop Daniel  
Bishop of the Coptic  
Orthodox Church – Diocese  
of Sydney & Affiliated  
Regions  
Vice-President of  
Australasian – Middle East  
Christian Apostolic  
Churches (AMEC)



Pastor Terry Johnson  
President  
Seventh-day  
Adventist Church in  
Australia



*Australia*

Dr Daryl Murdoch  
National Director  
Adventist Schools Australia



*Australia*

Mark Spencer  
Director of Public Policy  
Christian Schools Australia



Vanessa Cheng  
Executive Officer  
Australian Association  
of Christian Schools



Abdullah Khan  
President  
Islamic Schools Association  
of Australia



Al Stewart  
National Director  
Fellowship of Independent  
Evangelical Churches



Pastor Wayne Alcorn  
National President  
Australian Christian  
Churches



Wayne Swift  
National Leader  
Acts Global Churches



Pastor Ross Abraham  
Chairman  
International Network of  
Churches



The Rev David Tse  
Chairman  
Sydney Chinese  
Christian Churches  
Association



雪梨華人基督教聯會

Patrick Parkinson  
Chair  
Freedom for Faith

