

2019 Religious Freedom and Expression Policy

Key points:

- We believe in freedom of religion, and the attendant freedoms of expression, association, and thought
- We reject identity politics and enforcing acceptance of changeable, non-biological characteristics like gender expression and sexual identity.
- We believe all Australians should have the right to refuse to perform an act that would violate their conscience.
- We believe that religious freedom should be broadened rather than restricted
- The foundation of a free society is the free exchange of ideas
- We believe that the Bible provided the philosophical basis for Australia's freedom of religion and conscience

Australian Christians notes that in the 2016 Australian census seven in ten Australians identified with a religion. Around 52% identified with the Christian religionⁱ. We move that Australia broaden rather than restricts religious freedom.

The Sex Discrimination Actⁱⁱ presently arbitrarily “protects” *sexual orientation*ⁱⁱⁱ, *gender identity*^{iv} and *marital or relationship status*, even though none of these characteristics are provably genetic or inherent. We believe only race and gender should be protected characteristics, with exemptions as presently outlined.

As many religions hold views about the moral status of these questions, exemptions have been granted to religious organisations, a move which empowers the State to rule on the beliefs of religions. We reject enjoining the State and The Church, in any such manner.

To grant true freedom for all Australians, a general religious exemption from provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act should be modelled on the provision in the *Defence Act* for exemption from military service:

(1) *The following persons are exempt from service in the Defence Force in time of war...*

- (h) *persons whose conscientious beliefs do not allow them to participate in war or warlike operations;*
- (i) *persons whose conscientious beliefs do not allow them to participate in a particular war or particular warlike operations;*^v

We believe that Sections 37 and 38 of the Act should be replaced by a simple provision for exemption from the Act for persons, natural or corporate, whose conscientious beliefs do not allow them to comply with the Act, or with particular provisions of the Act.

The Government should not interfere with the ability of faith-based organisations or schools to operate in accordance with their ethos. It is clearly set forth in international human rights that parents must be able educate their children according to their preferred religious values^{vi}.

Australian Christians believes that as Australians we have much to be thankful for when considering our Christian heritage.

We believe that successive Federal, State and Local governments across Australia have a responsibility to uphold the principles at the root of our national heritage that have served us so well ensuring core freedoms for all; namely freedom of conscience, belief, speech and association.

Australian Christians supports the retention of Christian prayers at the outset of each daily parliamentary session.

We also believe that governments have a duty to allow the Church to continue to preach and teach according to their traditions.

Australian Christians rejects the discrimination or persecution of any person because of their religious beliefs. Australia is a tolerant and hospitable home to people of other faith traditions precisely because we uphold the Christian heritage and ideals of respect and religious freedom. There is not a conflict between religious tolerance and our shared Christian heritage which is founded upon the Golden Rule: do good to all. Australian Christians encourages cross-cultural dialogue to work cooperatively in our society to address social needs and international humanitarian crises.

We are appalled by the shameful incidents of church leaders who have been involved in or covered up abuse in denominational institutions.

We support legislation which will increase accountability and transparency in all organizations whether not-for profit, commercial, secular or faith based.

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ⁱ ABS Media Release: 2016 Census data reveals “no religion” is rising fast, 27 June 2017. Source: www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/7E65A144540551D7CA258148000E2B85

ⁱⁱ Sex Discrimination Act 1984. See Sections 5A, 5B and 6. Source: www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00499

ⁱⁱⁱ “At this stage, few conclusions can be drawn with certainty regarding genetic and environmental determinants of sexual orientation.” Dawood, K., Bailey, J. M., & Martin, N. G. (2009). Genetic and environmental influences on sexual orientation. In *Handbook of behavior genetics* (pp. 269-279). Springer, New York, NY. https://genepi.qimr.edu.au/contents/p/staff/NGMHandbookBehGen_Chapter19.pdf

^{iv} “Two decades of brain research have provided hints of a biological origin to being transgender, but no irrefutable conclusions.” Source: Trotta, D. *Born this way? Researchers explore the science of gender identity*, Reuters, 3 August 2017. Accessed: 31 January 2019. www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-biology/born-this-way-researchers-explore-the-science-of-gender-identity-idUSKBN1AJ0F0.

^v *Defence Act 1903 (Cth)*, section 61A.

^{vi} “According to the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990], and in much the same way as the Common Law recognises, a child has a right to 'appropriate direction and guidance' by parents in the exercise by the child of the rights recognised in the Convention (Article 5)... The parents' responsibilities, rights and duties to direct and guide their children must be respected by the State, under the Convention and, indeed, at Common Law.” Rayner M. *Human rights, families and community interests*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Family Matters No. 37 - April 1994. Accessed 31 January 2019. Source: <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/family-matters/issue-37/human-rights-families-and-community-interests>