



CORNERSTONE
Christian Fellowship

30/11/2017

Director, Legal Policy
Department of the Attorney-General and Justice
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DARWIN NT 0801

Cornerstone Christian Fellowship is a member church of the Baptist Union of the Northern Territory and has been present in the community of Howard Springs for about 12 years. There are approximately 100 adults as well as children who attend the church regularly. We are currently building a facility that should be completed in about March 2018.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the possible amendments to the Anti Discrimination Act. We believe it is important to modernise documents from time to time to increase clarity and reflect societal changes. We feel that some of the proposed changes are worthwhile and should be commended, especially in regard to people that are experiencing domestic violence and homelessness.

Some of the changes may not make for a more cohesive society and invoke some concern or anxiety for parents or others and carefully consideration about the implications of the proposed changes is necessary. As a religious body some of the proposed changes would have a serious effect on our religious freedoms along with those that are afforded to people of other faiths. We do not believe that we have a right to impose our beliefs onto others as Christianity is an invitation into the life of God; however it is important that we are allowed to follow our practices and remain faithful to the teaching we follow as equally as a person who chooses not to have a right to do so.

As previously stated many proposed amendments are admirable and we will comment on the questions that we feel might need further consideration.

Question 2: Should the attribute of "gender identity" be included in the Act?

If gender identity is included we feel that sex as an attribute should not be removed. We feel that it is important to recognise that such discriminations to be kept for certain activities as well as use of public toilet facilities. Just because someone may

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identify a certain way it is still important to be careful and considerate of others that may feel uneasy, especially when it comes to feelings of security and safety.

Question 3: Should intersex status be included as an attribute under the Act?

If it was decided to remove sex as an attribute this would not be a necessary change. Intersex could be included as a definition in sex as it is not currently defined in the act.

Question 4: Should vilification provisions be included in the Act? Should vilification be prohibited for attributes other than on the basis of race, such as disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, gender identity or intersex status?

This seems like a good amendment. However the statement of purpose, "Protection under the Act from vilification will provide legal **redress against extreme or pervasive vilification...**" does not seem to match up with the subjective levels of **offence and insult** in the proposed amendment. Perhaps this needs to have clarification to stop frivolous claims?

Question 14: Should any exemptions for religious or cultural bodies be removed?

This proposed change is in itself discriminatory in part as it excludes the rights of access to Aboriginal Sacred Sites while insisting the sacred sites of other religions should be open to anyone.

The philosophy of separation of church and state seems to be very one sided here by insisting that those who have any sort of religious belief have no right to practice what they believe in their own environments. Why would anyone want to join any organization, religious or not, if they do not subscribe to their belief system? If the best applicant to head up Greenpeace was also an avid trophy hunter would we expect discrimination? Of course. If, as is proposed, that the state gets to decide what grounds are acceptable if an organization applies for exemption it also raises the question of how the state will determine what is a valid reason or belief for exemption and if this is fluid?

The point here is that the motive of these organisations that have exemption is not to vilify or discriminate but live out a belief. People can choose not to enrol their children in a school; there are plenty of options, or to not join groups that they don't have shared values with. It is not a mandatory participation forced on anyone. Added to this if the exemptions currently are in place because of the offence that this is likely to cause to people of a particular religion it will surely open up the use of the proposed amendments in Question 4.



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In regard to facilities that a religious organisation has it must also be reasonable that they can rent out or hire facilities in accordance with their beliefs.

Will we get to the point of outlawing religion altogether? What exists is fair as all people have the opportunity to agree or disagree with a religion and religious organisations should not be forced to go against their core values if they are not bringing harm to others.

The violation of the human right to believe must be taken into consideration and the impact that this could have on the mental state or sense of well being of a person forced act against that person's moral code or core beliefs cannot be underestimated.

Question 20: Should definitions of "man" and "woman" be repealed?

We don't think that it would be necessary to remove these definitions and if the general term is applied it will not make a lot of difference to the act. However it is strange that these terms would be regarded as offensive.

Thank you again for your time in considering these comments.

Yours Sincerely

Neil Wright, Chair
On behalf of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship NT

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