



SCRIPTURE UNION

NORTHERN TERRITORY

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Friday, 26 January 2018

Director – Legal Policy
 Department of the Attorney-General and Justice
 GPO Box 1722
 Darwin NT 0801

RE: Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act Review Paper

To Whom it May Concern,

We write on behalf of the Council of Scripture Union NT. Scripture Union has existed in the Territory for over 55 years and globally for 150 years. During this time, we have engaged the community through work in schools, camps and events which benefit the community as a whole. We work alongside volunteers from local churches in proclaiming Jesus Christ to the next generation and seeking to engage them in bible reading and prayer on a regular basis.

We are thankful to be invited to give feedback on the discussion paper to modernise the anti-discrimination act. We are pleased that the laws of our country and Territory are reviewed and updated regularly to enable us as a society to "keep pace with contemporary standards and exceptions." We are thankful for the hard work that the Commissioner and their team has done thus far on the paper and acknowledge the good impact that some of these proposed changes will have within our community.

However, as a local movement of a global organisation, we would like to raise a few concerns about some of the proposed changes.

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

We support the desire to prevent "extreme or pervasive vilification". However, the terms 'offend' and 'insult' should not be included in this legislation. These terms set a very low bar and we are concerned that this may result in people worrying about whether they can say something on any particular topic. This type of wording opens up the threat of a discrimination charge as soon as anyone feels insulted or upset by another individual.

In particular as an inclusive organisation we seek to engage people from all walks of life and different cultures that are evident throughout the Territory. As we do this we share with them about Jesus Christ and teach, from the bible, what it means to be one of his followers. These beliefs will be "genuine beliefs held by a person making the comment" or sharing with the individuals in various contexts. We hope that scenarios such as this will be considered a reasonable exemption, rather than an opportunity for people who are offended by this teaching to bring a charge of vilification against us or one of our volunteers.

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Instead, we are in favour of respectful conversations that engages people that are considerate of each other's beliefs, whatever they may be.

14. *Should any exemptions for religious or cultural bodies be removed?*

We believe at the heart of this issue is the long-held freedom of religion that has been upheld as a fundamental human right and practiced within Australian law for decades.

"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom ... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching." - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - Article 18.1

As a religious movement we are concerned that if these exemptions are removed then we will not be able to choose when hiring employees or volunteers with regard to their faith. As a Christian movement we would find it difficult to therefore maintain our Christian ethos. We believe that being able to employ and recruit staff and volunteers who are in step with the religious values and beliefs of our movement, goes to the very heart of why we exist. All members, no matter their role, must share a common set of beliefs and practices to contribute to the vision and mission of the movement. This is what makes us or any other religious movement distinctive.

21. *Should the term "parenthood" be replaced with "carer responsibilities"?*

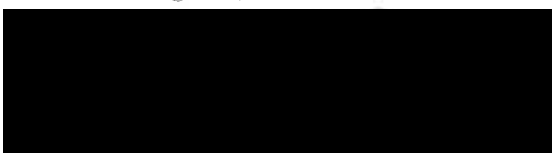
As responsible carers of young people whilst in our care, either on camps or other various activities, we acknowledge that "carers perform an important role for the community and it is important that they are protected under the Act." As temporary carers we do not replace the valuable and important role of a parent, but see that our role works alongside the parents is also important and valued. These roles however are distinct from each other.

We would therefore encourage you not to replace "parenthood" with "carer responsibilities" but rather acknowledge that both play a key role within society and both require the protection that this act would enable. Therefore, adding the term "carer responsibilities" as a separate notion would work well alongside the current "parenthood".

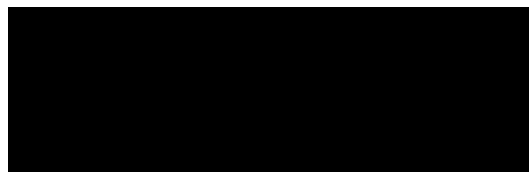
We would like to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the proposed changes to the Anti-Discrimination Act. As we have outlined some of the proposed changes could impact us as a Christian movement. We trust that these comments will be taken into account as you prepare the draft legislation and continue to move forward with this change in the Act.

If you would like to discuss any of this further then please feel free to contact us.

Kind Regards,



Richard Riley
Director
Scripture Union Northern Territory



Susannah Boer
Chair
Scripture Union Northern Territory

