



August 2019

Religious Discrimination Bill – Exposure Draft

Submission Form

Date of Submission: 2 October 2019

Your details

Organisation Name: Australian Baptist Ministries

Organisation Type:

Religious
organisation

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Publication of submissions

In meeting the Australian Government's commitment to enhancing the accessibility of published material, the Attorney-General's Department will only publish submissions to this website that have been submitted electronically. The following formats are preferred:

- Microsoft Word
- Rich Text Format (RTF)
- txt format.

Please limit individual file sizes to less than 5MB. The department may create PDF documents from the above formats.



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Would you prefer this submission to remain confidential?

No

Your Submission

Please respond in the box provided below.

Who we are

Australian Baptist Ministries is the trading name of The Baptist Union of Australia Inc. The Baptist Union of Australia is a voluntary association of State Baptist Unions and is incorporated under the Australian Capital Territory Associations Incorporation Act 1991.

Australian Baptists are a multi-cultural and multi-generational movement of people serving communities in metropolitan, regional, coastal, rural and remote Australia through a network of over 1,000 local churches with a combined regular attendance of around 170,000 people. At the 2016 census over 345,000 people listed their religious affiliation as Baptist.

Australian Baptist Ministries is a federated organisation, partnering with local churches through State Baptist Union entities.

While some local Baptist Churches are incorporated entities most operate as separate unincorporated entities. Some of our State Baptist Unions are incorporated by acts of state parliaments.

Australian Baptist Ministries would be seen by the community in general as the peak body of the Baptist movement in Australia.

While the Baptist ethos values the autonomy of the local congregation, there are many times, places and occasions where a national voice or opinion is sought from Christian denominations and other times and occasions where, in our view, a national statement on behalf of the Baptist movement in Australia can contribute significantly to the national debate or thinking.

Our Submission

ABM appreciates the opportunity to make a submission on the draft bill.

ABM welcomes the draft bill and commends the Government for including general provisions for the protection of people of faith from discrimination in Commonwealth law. ABM also appreciates the opportunity to make this submission.

While in positive agreement with the bulk of the draft bill we are concerned about several specific items. Our concerns are very similar to those contained in the submission by Freedom for Faith. ABM is a member of Freedom for Faith and fully supports the suggestions in their submission to the redrafting of sections of the proposed bill.

Given our full support to the Freedom for Faith submission, in the ABM submission we seek to highlight several matters that are of particular concern to our Australian Baptist churches.

We are concerned at the lack of clarity of some terms used in the draft bill.

1. These include ambiguity around the phrase 'religious activity'. In some sections of the community this could be restricted to what happens in a church worship service. However, for members of the Baptist community, religious activity is an expression of faith that is a whole of life experience and not only confined to public worship on a Sunday.
2. While we agree that people should not be vilified it is not clear how the word 'vilify' is to be understood as it is used in the proposed legislation.
3. The bulk of our local Baptist churches are unincorporated associations and it is not clear if the definition of 'person' includes unincorporated local churches.
4. The definition of religious body and the exclusion of anybody that 'engages solely or primarily in commercial activity'. There are numerous local Baptist churches that are engaged in providing services to their communities for which there is a fee for service. These include day-care, preschool and before and after school care, counselling and personal support services, recreational and sporting activities and camping sites and associated activities. All these activities while

engaging in a commercial activity in terms of a fee for service, are undertaken as a direct outworking of the belief and teaching of the Baptist churches.