

Media Release



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NT Christian Schools Thrown To The Lions

“Australia does not get to choose ... between protecting religious freedom and providing for equality before the law. It must do both under its international obligations.”

Expert Panel on Religious Freedom, Final Report, 2018

Christian schools in the Northern Territory have been ‘thrown to the lions’ by proposed changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* according to Christian Schools Australia Director of Public Policy, Mark Spencer.

The changes proposed by the Government will make the Northern Territory **the only jurisdiction in the country** that does not have a specific exemption that allows religious schools to employ staff who share their beliefs. These types of clauses are limited and conditional, providing a carefully considered protection for religious freedom, as required by international law.

The Exposure Draft of amendments that was released by the Government for public consultation in July proposed a narrowing of the protections to ensure that it only applied ‘on the grounds of religious belief or activity’ and only where the action ‘enables, or better enables, the application of the doctrine in the educational institution’. **There was no discussion or consultation by the Government** proposing its complete removal, which came as a complete shock to faith groups when the Bill was tabled last week.

‘The Northern Territory Government’s decision to remove these limited protections for religious freedom is shattering’, Mr Spencer said, ‘and **people of all faiths and none in the Northern Territory should be very concerned by the Government’s lack of respect for diversity of belief in a multicultural, multifaith society**’.

‘The abandonment of protections for fundamental human rights, without warning or consultation, while claiming to “give others a fair go” is **Orwellian double-speak**’, he said.

‘Inquiry after inquiry has found that **protections for religious freedom should be strengthened, not abandoned**.’

‘Without the very basic protections proposed in the Exposure Draft bill, Christian schools in the Northern Territory have been **‘thrown to the lions**’, and the rights of parents and carers to choose a genuine faith-based education for their children completely disrespected’.

‘The ALP’s National Platform claims Labor supports “the right of religious organisations to act in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of their faith”, so why is the Northern Territory Labor Government doing exactly the opposite?’ asked Mr Spencer.

‘The Northern Territory Government needs to **abandon these proposed changes** or these statements in the ALP’s National Platform become meaningless platitudes’.

ENDS

For all media enquiries:

Mark Spencer, Director of Public Policy
[mspencer@csa.edu.au](mailto:m Spencer@csa.edu.au) | 0419 419 224

About Christian Schools Australia

Christian Schools Australia is the largest association of Christian schools in the country and has member schools educating around 72,000 students and employing more than 10,000 staff at more than 180 locations across Australia. CSA is part of the global ACSI network of 24,000 schools educating in excess of 5.5 million students in over 108 countries world-wide.

