

Dr David Gee BVSc (Evangelist)  
Cornerstone Presbyterian Church

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Attn: Committee Secretary

I would like to firstly thank the Committee for considering the question of religious freedom in Australia. Over recent years I have seen increasing threats to freedom of religious belief and practice both in my own work and in the lives of others in our country. I will attempt to briefly outline some of these threats and restrictions.

Australia is both culturally and legally committed to political and religious freedom. Our nation is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPRs, Article 18) which expressly provides “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to ... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHRs, Article 18) also recognises the right of freedom of religion to include the right “to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Despite this there are at least three fronts on which these freedoms are being undermined. Firstly the push to redefine marriage, secondly the various state based anti-discrimination laws, and finally the various laws restricting freedom of conscience.

The first two issues are intertwined and form concurrent threats to freedom of religion. In my work as an evangelist I have stood against those who seek to redefine marriage and provided biblical, scientific and practical reasons why marriage should remain unchanged in law. Due to this stance I have personally experienced threats of law suits should same sex marriage become legal; and complaints made against me based on anti-discrimination legislation.

This is not only personal, as for many years now opponents to religious freedom of speech have consistently used the threat of complaints and legal action as a gag on public religious voices in Hobart. This was clearly seen in the media when Rodney Croome called for litigation to be brought against Julian Porteous for an open letter to his own archdiocese; and it happened.

The way that anti-discrimination law is worded in Tasmanian legislation a defense in tribunal would be required for a gently worded Christian response to issues such as same sex marriage, abortion, or sinful lifestyles etc. This applies even to a direct quote from scripture according to the Commissioner’s staff’s communication with me as of 2016. Myself and many others have made submissions to alter this legislation, particularly sections 17 (1) and 19 of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998.

Regrettably offensiveness has become the measure of whether something is fit for public discourse or not. Also there are members of our society that have repeatedly shown their willingness to be

“offended” at others when disagreed with and then take that offense to law. This constitutes an acute threat to freedom of religious practice and religious free speech.

Finally I mention an issue facing friends of mine who are doctors, the prevention of their practice according to their conscience. Section 7 of the Tasmanian Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Act requires health professionals to refer a patient to a practitioner who will provide an abortion if they have a conscientious objection. This legislation effectively means conscientious objectors must send a person to obtain an abortion regardless of their objections. Victorian Abortion Law Reform Act and proposed euthanasia/assisted dying laws in Australia have similar provisions. In addition to this laws such as Victoria’s Health Complaints Act 2016 restrict counselors in counseling on homosexual attraction.

Thank you again for considering these issues and threats to religious freedom in Australia.

God Bless,

David Gee BVSc (Evangelist)