

4

**Senator Stoker:** Ultimately, yes, and I'm working closely with him to make sure that the government delivers upon its commitment to Australians to address this issue that was made at the last election.

**Senator O'NEILL:** In a bipartisan way?

**Senator Stoker:** It's my hope we can do so in a bipartisan way, yes. It is an important issue that goes to the fundamental rights of Australians to be able to think as they wish and live according to their own beliefs, and I think that's something that deserves some bipartisan outreach.

**Senator O'NEILL:** We look forward to seeing that happen in the near term, I hope, Senator Stoker. In terms of the actual responsibility for advancing this matter—it's been in abeyance for some time—when you say you're 'working closely' with Minister Porter, who has carriage of the draft bill?

**Senator Stoker:** At the moment it's Senator Cash, obviously, assisted by me.

**Senator O'NEILL:** So you do not have independent carriage of this. It will not be by your action that this advances; it will be you assisting whoever determines the time line and the action with regard to this bill?

**Senator Stoker:** That's right.

**Senator O'NEILL:** The last series of questions in this committee on this topic were asked by Senator Carr, and I'm keen to see if there's been any progress since that date. Since the last budget estimates, has there been any progress on the draft bill?

**Senator Stoker:** It depends on what you're asking about. Have there been discussions between different stakeholders about where it's up to and about what they'd like to see in the final version? Then, yes. Has it been introduced? No.

**Senator O'NEILL:** We're talking about since October last year. Can you outline the consultation that's been undertaken with regard to the draft legislation—the second draft piece?

**Senator Stoker:** I would take on notice the details of meetings and things like that. I know I've had a number of meetings with people interested, and a number of teleconferences and the like with people who wish to be heard on this matter. There is a lot of community interest in ensuring that the bill is both delivered and that it is effective in meeting its objectives. There are just too many for me to be able to recount dates and times at this point in time.

**Senator O'NEILL:** So is it fair to say that, since October, you have reactivated engagement with people who are interested in this religious discrimination matter?

**Senator Stoker:** It's certainly true of myself, since I came into the role in December. And I am happy to take it on notice in relation to the Attorney and Acting Attorney.

**Senator O'NEILL:** So is it fair to say that you've been leading the consultation, Senator Stoker?

**Senator Stoker:** I've been playing an important role, but it has been a team effort.

**Senator O'NEILL:** Has Minister Porter been meeting with any of these groups, or has he delegated that to staff in his office?