



24th February 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I write on behalf of St Paul's Lutheran Congregation, Henty NSW, as the owner and operator of a small rural religious school. We are thankful for the opportunity to make a submission to the proposals set out in the ALRC consultation paper in regards to Religious Education Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws. However, we are dismayed by the short time frame of only four weeks since its release that was allowed for submissions.

Our school is a member of Lutheran Education Australia along with nearly 80 other schools across Australia. We believe our parents choose our school for their children not only because it strives for excellence in education, but because it also provides a caring and safe community of faith with values and an ethos that are drawn from our Christian faith.

We object to the proposals and believe that the implementation of them, particularly those in B, C and D, would be unlikely to continue the very freedom and right of religious schools that is put forward in point 50 of the paper: that they "can continue to build a community of faith by giving preference, in good faith, to persons of the same religion as the educational institution in the selection of staff".

While the paper proposes to continue to exempt some anti-discrimination laws for staff and leaders of institutions who specifically teach religious content (and teaching of religious pastors), it does not appreciate the fact that any teacher or staff member in a religious school does not just teach curriculum but will take a holistic approach to improve individual student outcomes with regard to the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical and social aspects of their lives.

So we believe (quoting from Proposition C-2) that complying with the "nature and religious ethos of [our] educational institution...is a genuine requirement of the role" for all staff employed within our school. Propositions B, C and D fail to recognise this fact and will possibly prevent our school from employing teachers which will uphold the values and ethos of our school. These values and ethos are important parts of why parents choose to educate their children at our school - and they often make considerable financial sacrifices to do so instead of enrolling their children in a free public school.

Our Lutheran congregation and its school hold to the teachings of Jesus Christ and as such we welcome with love and compassion anybody, regardless of who they are and

what they believe, into our community of faith. Indeed, in accepting students, this has always happened within our school regardless of any anti-discrimination laws. However, belonging to a faith community (or any community for that matter) holds with it the expectation that members will share the same values as that community or at very least not publicly oppose those values.

In the paper the section titled "Inquiry approach" states that:

"Freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination (among others) are 'important rights in a liberal society and represent important underlying values'. Religion is of great importance in many people's lives, and can be central to a person's identity, sense of self, and purpose."

We believe the proposals put forward in this paper will infringe these rights. We question the value of a law which infringes on the rights of a larger number of people as opposed to the smaller number whose rights it ostensibly seeks to protect. Which will do the most harm?

Yours Faithfully,
St Paul's Congregation.