

14 November, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament House, Canberra

By e-mail: em@aph.gov.au

Submission on Religious Participation in Democracy

Who are we?

1. This submission is on behalf of, and co-signed by:
 - Australian Baptist Ministries
 - Australian Christian Churches
 - Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney
 - Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW
 - Seventh-day Adventist Church
 - Australian Jewish Association
 - NSW Council of Churches
 - The Church of Scientology
 - Hillsong Church
 - Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches
 - International Network of Churches
 - Full Gospel Australia
2. The submission was coordinated by Freedom for Faith, a Christian legal think tank that exists to see religious freedom for all faiths protected and promoted in Australia and beyond. Freedom for Faith is led by people drawn from a range of denominational churches including the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, the Australian Christian Churches, Australian Baptist Churches, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia. It has strong links with, and works co-operatively with, a range of other faith groups in Australia.
3. We welcome the opportunity to make this submission and we give consent for this submission to be published. Our contact details are as follows.

Freedom for Faith

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4. This submission raises concerns about recent language regarding the involvement of people of faith in the political sphere and the 2025 Federal Election, and particularly regarding the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC).
5. Members of faith communities have always been politically active, and have networked through their faiths to encourage others to be involved. Historically, networks through Christian denominations have had strong affiliations with one party or another and actively recruited membership and volunteers for election day. More recently, the Muslim Votes Matter campaign produced “how to vote” cards in all 150 seats, stating preferred candidates,¹ and recruited volunteers to man polling booths.²
6. In this context, we are particularly concerned about the recent focus and language used by Members of Parliament regarding the PBCC.
7. In particular, this language appears to attack a faith based on the actions of some of its members, and attribute motivation to that religious community as a whole.
8. If specific organisations or Registered Charities have contravened electoral laws, then – religious or not – those organisations should be investigated by the relevant authorities.
9. (On that issue, we note the recent testimony from ACNC Commissioner Sue Woodward to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee that no investigation of a Registered Charity regarding the 2025 election progressed to a “show cause” notice or any other action.³)
10. In contrast, recruitment of members or volunteers through a faith network is extremely common and an expression of democracy – as is similar recruitment through any other community groups, such as unions, environmental groups or business associations. To argue that recruitment is acceptable in a secular network and not in a church would be clear religious discrimination and effectively disenfranchising a group based on their faith.
11. As faith leaders, we are concerned by commentary from both the media and politicians that gathers together actions and alleged actions by individuals and organisations associated with a faith community, and attributes these actions to the faith as a whole.
12. This has culminated in the Prime Minister calling the PBCC a “cult”. There have also been indications that this Committee might take a specific focus on investigating the actions of members of the PBCC.⁴ In Senate Estimates, notwithstanding the testimony from Commissioner Woodward that no Registered Charity had been given a “show cause” notice, a Government Senator pursued questions targeting the PBCC, quoting a Sydney Morning Herald article as evidence of potential wrong-doing.⁵ Recently, further incidents

¹ <https://www.muslimvotesmatter.com.au/election>

² <https://www.muslimvotesmatter.com.au/join-us>

³ https://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Read_Listen/ParlView/video/3951666 21:48ff

⁴ <https://www.mirrorweekly.com/489763/>

⁵ https://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Read_Listen/ParlView/video/3951666 21:48ff

have occurred of Committee members asking targeted questions about the PBCC while not discussing any other faith groups.

13. Faith communities – both large and small – are concerned by the precedent set with this language. Targeting individuals or organisations because they have a particular faith affiliation is extremely concerning, as is attributing motive to that faith community as a whole. Over history, many faith groups have been accused of orchestrating conspiracies against democracy. Many of these accusations have led to serious persecution of minority faiths, sometimes with government support.
14. While we are not suggesting that the Government is progressing on this course, the current language is an unsettling precedent, and one that needs to be actively corrected for the good of all faith communities.
15. It is entirely appropriate that Registered Charities are held to account for their charitable purposes, and the appropriate authorities duly investigate any concerns. However, it is unacceptable and dangerous to connect a charity with activities of some members and other people of the same faith simply based on that shared faith.
16. In addition, it is highly inappropriate that a Member of Parliament, and especially the Prime Minister, would refer to any religious group by using the pejorative term “cult”. It is not the role of government to determine what are acceptable religious beliefs. That, equally, sets a disconcerting precedent.
17. We urge the Committee, the Government, and all politicians to refrain from attributing the behaviour of any individual or organisation to their faith community, and from targeting individuals or organisations simply because of their faith affiliation.



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