

Sydney Anglicans

2026: Issue 1

FREEDOM MATTERS

Religious Freedom Update



Informing and equipping you to
take action to protect religious freedom

www.freedomforfaith.com.au

Reflection

Laws that outlaw speech are the biggest threat to religious freedom in Australia at the moment.

There has been a recent explosion of laws that restrict speech. In the 34 years from 1989–2023, there were 19 Bills that imposed restrictions on speech. The same number of Bills have been passed in the last 26 months. These new laws prohibit or regulate hate speech, vilification, right wing ideology, conversion practices and harmful online content.

The particular concern for religious freedom arises from moves to suppress speech merely on the basis that it is hateful or offensive. Compounding this, in some jurisdictions this is assessed subjectively from the perspective of a member of the target group. This means that hate speech becomes 'speech that I find hateful' and offensive speech is 'speech that offends me'. Criminalising so called 'hate-speech' is wrong, because it undercuts the principles of tolerance that underpin our western liberal democracy. It blurs the distinction between speech that is awful and speech that is unlawful. The antidote to bad speech is not to suppress it but to challenge it in the free market of ideas through robust public debate, so that the truth may prevail.

Current Threats

This document sets out various threats to religious freedom, a description of the threat, the threat level (the seriousness of the threat) and what action you can take.

Overall threat level to religious freedom in Australia is **HIGH**



Taking Action

Resources to assist you to contact your local MP on current issues can be found at: www.contactyourmp.org.au

For more information on current issues, go to: www.freedomforfaith.org.au/current-issues/

Current Threats

Combating Antisemitism Hate & Extremism Act 2026 (Cth)



What is the Threat?

Hate speech provisions in the original Bill would have threatened the ability of Christians to teach in accordance with God's word on the basis that Christian teaching is hate speech.

The original Bill criminalised (with 5 years imprisonment) speech which caused a member of the target group to have feelings of 'intimidation' or 'fear of harassment' (s80.2BF).

This is a very low bar for criminalising speech. Although initially limited to hate speech against race, Labor indicated a willingness to expand the protected group from race/ethnicity to other protected attributes such as religion, gender identity and sexual orientation.

If that were to occur, preaching the gospel calling on people to repent, calling on a person to live in accordance with God's word or even asking someone more than once to an evangelistic event could be deemed to be 'harassment' or 'intimidation'. The Equality Australia mantra used to be 'love is love'. Now it seems that their mantra is 'hate is hate'.

What does the Act say?

The 'hate group' provisions deem conduct to be a hate crime regardless of whether the conduct was criminal, and it retrospectively deems conduct to be a hate crime even if the conduct was not criminal at the time the conduct occurred.

A religious organisation could be listed in future for being a hate group based on activities or teaching which at the time were not criminal, with no obligation on the Minister to apply principles of procedural fairness.

Aggravated sentences apply for religious leaders (including Sunday school teachers, bible study leaders) for crimes, likewise for publishing 'violent extremist material' especially if directed towards under 18s.

Submission:

Click [HERE](#) for Freedom for Faith Submission #182

What Action can I take?

1. Continue to teach and minister as usual.
2. Be aware of this ongoing threat to religious speech and be willing to speak up to protect our word ministries.

Current Threats



Crimes Summary Offences Amendment Bill 2025 (NSW)

What is the Threat?

The Bill purports to address anti-semitism through outlawing behaviour and speech that is 'consistent with Nazi ideology' (without defining that term). The Bill also repeals a sunset clause in the Crimes Act that put a 3 year limit on criminal vilification provisions in s93ZAA of the Crimes Act, which means that those provisions will continue to apply.

The religious text exemption does not adequately preserve the religious freedoms of believers to communicate genuine religious teaching, as it only covers directly quoting from or referencing a religious text. Paraphrasing or summarising religious teaching is not covered by the exemption.

What does the Bill say?

The extension of criminal vilification includes conduct (by a public act) that indicates support for Nazi ideology, which would cause a reasonable person to fear harassment, intimidation or violence. The definition of 'public act' would include private communications in a context where the public may have access, such as inside a church.

If 'violence' or 'harm' is interpreted to include psychological harm, this could capture religious teaching on sexual ethics, calls to repent etc.

Nazi ideology is not defined anywhere in the Act. In recent submissions Equality Australia has referred to "Neo-Nazis and religious extremists" in relation to teaching on sexual ethics.

Submission:

Click [HERE](#) for Anglican Diocese of Sydney Submission

What Action should I take?

1. Contact your MP and ask them not to pass the Bill in its current form. "consistent with Nazi ideology" is too vague and must be defined.
2. Adequate protections for religious teaching and preaching must be included.

Current Threats

NSW Hate Crimes (Inciting Racial Hatred) Act 2025 (NSW)



What is the Threat?

The breadth of the vilification provision regarding 'incitement of hatred' could become a blasphemy law by criminalising the criticism of one religion by another.

Section 93ZAA addressing hate speech had a sunset clause but this will be repealed if the above Summary Offences Act is passed.

The government has received the report from the Sackar Review but this has not been released. This has been overtaken with other hate speech laws in NSW and Federally.

The ability to speak, teach and preach the gospel and to call people to repent remains under threat.

What does the Act say?

S93ZAA has risks to religious freedom in preaching, teaching and proselytising. The 'religious text' exemption is not wide enough to protect communication of religious teaching.

The section prohibits by a public act, intentionally incites hatred towards another person on the grounds of race.

The vilification provisions are a 'harms based' provision. Whether speech is criminal is determined upon what a reasonable member of the target group would 'fear harassment, intimidation or violence' which is a hypothetically subjective measure of criminality.

Equality Australia and others are arguing the govt to extend this to other protected attributes including gender identity and sexuality.

Submission:

Click [HERE](#) for Anglican Diocese of Sydney Submission to Sackar Review

What Action should I take?

1. Pray that the Sackar Review would result in appropriate recommendations to improve the ability to freely preach according to the Bible.
2. Contact your MP to ask for the sunset clause in s93ZAC not to be repealed.

Current Threats

Conversion Practices Ban Act 2024 (NSW)



What is the Threat?

Despite promises by the Premier that an individual may seek prayer and pastoral guidance without this being banned as a conversion practice; the Attorney-General and Anti-discrimination NSW have both indicated that prayer and pastoral care if directed to 'suppressing' a person's sexual desires would be regarded as a conversion practice.

Conversion practice would therefore include: instructing someone to remain celibate if not married in a heterosexual relationship, prayer supporting a voluntary decision to live celibately, even encouragement not to engage in an affair or to watch pornography as these would all be 'suppressing' a person's sexual desires (regardless of sexual orientation) and therefore a conversion practice.

For more information:

Read the [Freedom for Faith analysis](#) of the Act

Click [HERE](#) for to read the ADNSW view

What does the Act say?

Section 3(b) exempts 'genuinely facilitating an individual's coping skills...including by providing acceptance, support or understanding" however the Attorney-General's -2nd reading speech severely restricted the application of this exception for services or support "*which have as a predetermined outcome that a person ought to suppress their sexual orientation or gender identity.*"

In other words if a faith that holds that sexual activity should only be within a heterosexual marriage, then encouraging someone to follow the tenets of that faith and live a celibate life if not in a heterosexual marriage would be a 'predetermined outcome' and a conversion practice.

Section 3(c) exemption is qualified with words provided the teaching 'is not directed to changing or suppressing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity,' making the exemption at best unclear and at worst useless.

What Action should I take?

Representations to government are ongoing.

1. Pray that these would be fruitful so that people of faith can seek the support they desire to live in accordance with their faith
2. Be ready to contact your MP when asked if those discussions are not fruitful.

Current Threats

NSW Human Rights Bill Inquiry



What is the Threat?

The NSW Greens introduced a Human Rights Bill in Oct 2025. This was due to lapse but despite indications it would not be supported by the government, it has now been sent to a Parliamentary Inquiry.

Some of the key concerns with the Bill include:

1. A General limitations clause which prejudices religious freedoms and does not reflect proper limitations under international law.
2. The Bill redefines and reduces the efficacy of certain rights especially of thought, conscience and belief and parental rights, while elevating others like non-discrimination rights.
3. The Bill invents new 'progressive' rights at the expense of established human rights

Why are we not in favour of a human rights Bill?

- Human rights laws have the capacity to undermine parliamentary sovereignty by requiring judges to apply deliberately vague human rights subject to an also vague 'proportionality' test drawing the judiciary into law-making. This may in turn erode our freedom of religion in Australia, especially when there is no explicit legislation protecting religious freedom.
- All proposals for Human Rights Bills we have seen
 - Redefine internationally defined rights in a manner that waters down religious freedom
 - Subordinate religious freedom under other rights
 - Require public authorities to implement this modified rights structure throughout their organisations.
- No Human Rights Bill in Australia has ever accurately reflected International treaty rights especially regarding religious freedom.
- Bills of rights do not protect citizens - which was evident in VIC during Covid lockdown. VIC had a Charter of Rights which proved ineffective.

Submissions:

The NSW Bill can be found [HERE](#)
Read the HRLA Submission (#14)
and Freedom for Faith Submission
(#119) on the Federal proposal [HERE](#)

What Action should I take?

1. Contact your MP to express concern at this ambit claim Bill which affects religious freedom.
2. Consider making a submission to the Inquiry

Current Threats

Voluntary Assisted Dying Legislative Review (NSW)



What is the Threat?

The NSW government is conducting a review of the operation of the VAD Act and its provisions.

In every jurisdiction (inc VIC) where VAD has been legalised, safeguards are redefined as 'barriers to access' and eligibility widened to make VAD easier to obtain. In VIC they have reduced wait times in some cases, reduced qualifications for certifying doctors, and allowed doctors to initiate conversations regarding VAD.

Currently there are no exemptions in NSW for faith based aged care facilities which are required to provide access to VAD onsite.

In NSW medical practitioners are required to provide information regarding VAD even if they object to VAD on conscience grounds.

What does our Submission say?

We urge that:

1. "**safeguards**" are not redefined as 'barriers to access' and weakened
2. **eligibility** to access VAD is not widened (under the guise of 'equitable access') to minors, for mental illness or non-terminal conditions
3. **exemptions** are introduced for **faith-based aged care facilities** (as is provided for hospitals) to protect the consciences of those who operate and work in those institutions, and to ensure that they can operate in accordance with their doctrines, tenets and beliefs.

Submission:

The Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney submission is not yet publicly available.

What Action should I take?

1. Submissions to the Review closed 27 Feb.
2. Be prepared to contact your MP if adverse amendments to the Legislation are announced following the Review

Current Threats

NSWLRC Anti-Discrimination Act Review



What is the Threat?

Potential changes to the Anti-Discrimination Act could see religious schools and other faith-based bodies lose their ability to operate according to their deeply held beliefs by imposing restrictions on their right to employ staff or leaders and requiring a judge to consider whether all their decisions are 'reasonable and proportionate'.

Religious schools would also lose the ability to have school rules that reflect their religious ethos.

The NSWLRC Consultation Paper can be found [HERE](#)

What is the current threat?

A review on ADA process (the making, accepting and determining of complaints) is due to commence in the first half of 2026.

The risk is that changes to process (like those proposed below in NT) make the 'process the punishment' where vexatious, or unmeritorious claims are accepted by ADNSW and a defendant then has to expend time and money to defend a complaint at a Tribunal.

Submission:

Read the Anglican Diocese of Sydney Submission [HERE](#)

What Action should I take?

1. Contact your State MP. The Diocese has made a submission to the NSW LRC & Bp Stead has appeared at the Inquiry.
2. By expressing your concern to your local member, it will support those efforts.

Future Threats

VIC Inquiry into Cults



What is the Threat?

The VIC government is conducting an inquiry into cults, coercive control and high demand groups.

This will pose serious risks to religious freedom if those issues are not carefully defined. Poorly drafted laws could criminalise religious practices – especially as the definition of ‘cult’ could include mainstream religious groups.

The inquiry states: *“A cult is best understood as a group defined not by its beliefs, but by its behaviour.”* See the Inquiry’s guidelines describe cult ‘tactics’ and ‘methods’ [HERE](#)

The report from the Inquiry is due in Sept 2026. We anticipate legislation will follow.

What does the Inquiry say?

Finding a legally enforceable definition of what comprises a cult is notoriously difficult. The inquiry describes ‘recruitment tactics’ of cults as including offering belonging, promoting spiritual transformation or providing spiritual guidance (esp when someone is suffering emotional distress or going through a vulnerable period) – which are all activities of churches.

Another cult ‘tactic’ is said to be ‘gradual indoctrination’: Slowly introducing core beliefs and increasing commitment through rituals, group activities, or study sessions. There is a risk of mainstream Christian activity being interpreted as cult indicators.

Some advocacy groups have made submissions which have framed evangelical Christianity and other faiths as inherently coercive; equating religious devotion with psychological harm.

Submission:

Read the Freedom for Faith submission [HERE](#)

What Action should I take?

1. Read the submission from Freedom for Faith
2. Pray that the Inquiry Committee will note those concerns and that the definition of cult does not include mainstream Christian groups.
3. If in VIC, be prepared to contact your MP if adverse legislation is proposed.

Future Threats

WA Conversion Practices Ban



What is the Threat?

In 2022 the WA Govt announced they were planning to ban 'LGBTIQA+ conversion practices'.

The government produced a Consultation Paper (CP) in 2022 that was shared with some groups but not released publicly. It was reportedly modelled on the VIC legislation.

The WA Attorney General announced in 2025 that a ban on conversion therapy will be introduced to Parliament by the end of the year but without providing any details.

What is the risk to Religious Freedom?

If the CP reported uses a definition of 'conversion practice' based on VIC legislation. "Suppress" includes simply not doing something. In Victoria, "suppress" includes celibacy, or simply encouraging someone not to act on a sexual desire.

'Sexual orientation' is defined as including sexual activity – which means that teaching anyone to have sexual restraint (e.g., telling a married man not to commit adultery) would be a suppression practice. Placing limitations on a transgender person's expression of their preferred gender in practice (eg, in respect of uniforms, facilities use etc) or praying for such a person to follow the Bible would also be unlawful.

If the proposals were similar to those in NSW outlined above, this would mean that churches would need to admit persons who do not share or live in accordance with religious teaching as leaders or members, with all the accordant power and responsibilities of those offices. This would fundamentally alter the character of religious bodies.

What Action should I take?

1. Encourage those you know in WA to be prepared to make submissions to their local member if legislation is introduced, or to an inquiry if it is announced.

Past Threats

For Past Threats, click on the links below to access prior editions of [Freedom Matters](#) for an explainer of the threat and action to take.

Religious Discrimination Bill (Cth) – the ‘RDB’

For more information see the Freedom for Faith website [HERE](#)

Read the past edition of Freedom Matters on the RDB [HERE](#)

NT Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill 2025

Read the past edition of Freedom Matters on the NT Bill [HERE](#)

Read the [NT government explainer](#) of the proposed changes

Disclaimer

The content of this document is intended only to provide a summary and general overview on religious freedom matters. It is not intended to be comprehensive nor does it constitute legal advice. If you need advice in relation to a particular situation you should seek your own independent legal advice.