



Australian Hellenic Council NSW Inc.

A coordinating body for the Australian Hellenic community



Greek Orthodox Community of NSW

MEDIA RELEASE

The Australian Hellenic Council, together with the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales, has come out in strong opposition to the Federal Government's proposed changes to the Racial Discrimination Act.

At a public forum held in Lakemba on 24 April 2014 the Co-Ordinator of the Australian Hellenic Council, Mr George Vellis, and the President of the Greek Orthodox Community, Mr Harry Danalis, both denounced the proposed changes as constituting an attack on our rich multicultural society and way of life. The Government's Exposure Draft, if passed, would no longer make it a breach of the Act to insult, offend or humiliate someone on the basis of his or her race or ethnic background, whilst the draft proposed changes would also mean that if someone is racially vilified in the course of public or social discussion on any issue of public interest then such comments would be exempt.

The Federal Labor MP Tony Burke and State Labor MLC Sophie Cotsis both addressed the audience and pointed out that this was tantamount to licensing racial hatred in Australia. According to Burke, "freedom of speech is not about the right to abuse each other or make people feel worthless because of their race, their very existence".

The public forum also heard from other ethnic community leaders, including Peter Wertheim of the Executive Council of Jewry, Patrick Voon of the Chinese Australian Forum and Luke Song of the Korean Society of Sydney who emphasised the impact that the proposed changes might have on their respective communities.

The general consensus of the meeting was that the proposed changes in the law go to the very heart of multiculturalism and would provide a "free pass" to bigotry and racial abuse.

The meeting also voted unanimously to support a resolution that there be no change to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

The Greek community in Sydney stands with other ethnic communities and associations in opposing the proposed changes to a law that has worked well for the last 20 years and balanced the right of free speech with the need to protect people from severe and profound racial abuse.



Left to Right

Kathy Kouvas, Tom Christopoulos, Patrick Voon (Australian Chinese Forum), Steve Georgiou, Luke Song (Korean Society of Sydney), Sophie Cotsis (NSW MLC), Dimitrios Kametopoulos, Katina Nicholas, Andrew Tsounis (Rockdale Councillor), Sotirios Tsouris (Cyprus Community), Peter Wertheim (Executive Council of Australian Jewry), Mersina Tonys-Soulos, George Vellis (Australian Hellenic Council), Nia Karteris, George Vardas, Harry Danalis (Greek Orthodox Community), Michael Tsilimnos.