



Australian Hellenic Council NSW Inc.

A coordinating body for the Australian Hellenic community

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

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Community leaders Unanimously Reject Government Exposure Draft on Race Hate Law

Representatives of the Indigenous, Greek, Jewish, Chinese, Arab, Armenian, Korean and Cypriot communities today unanimously called on the Federal government to scrap the “*Freedom of Speech (Repeal of section 18C) Bill 2014*”, saying that “it sends the wrong message about the kind of society we want Australia to be”.

The group has been pursuing a vigorous campaign to dissuade Federal politicians against any repeal or watering down of Australia’s laws against racial vilification.

“Our community organisations wholeheartedly support the call by the Australian Human Rights Commission for the government’s Exposure Draft not to proceed”, said George Vellis, acting as spokesperson for the group.

“We share the Commission’s view that hundreds of complaints about racial hatred have been successfully resolved over the past two decades under the existing law and that no case has been made for any proposed changes.”

Mr Vellis said that each of the community organisations represented by the group has made a written submission to the government in response to the Exposure Draft.

“In our unanimous view, the government has asserted, but not demonstrated, that the existing law imposes an unjustified limitation on freedom of expression. It has made this assertion in the face of voluminous evidence to the contrary”.

He cited “research in Australia and overseas as to the harms of racial vilification; the conclusions of three national inquiries as to the nexus between racial vilification and racially-motivated violence and other forms of social dysfunction; and the significant body of jurisprudence that has given effect to the existing law.”

Commenting on the government’s announced reasons for wishing to change the current law, Mr Vellis said that the government had proceeded from the “fixed assumption” that the outcome of one case - *Eatock v Bolt* - was an injustice necessitating a change in the legislation.

“That assumption is far from universally accepted by the Australian people. On the contrary, two recent surveys have indicated that the existing law has overwhelming public support from across the political spectrum.”

The group has said that if the government wishes to undertake a serious review of the current law, it should hold an open, public inquiry, as occurred in the lead-up to the enactment of the current law.

“Any Inquiry should have input from experts and the wider community, particularly those communities whose members are most vulnerable to experiencing racial discrimination. The Inquiry should not begin from any *a priori* assumptions about the current law, and for that reason the entire Exposure Draft should be abandoned,” Mr Vellis concluded.

Endorsed by:

Ms Kirstie Parker, Co-chair, National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

Mr Les Malezer, Co-chair, National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

Mr Vache Kahramanian, Executive Director, Armenian National Committee of Australia

Ms Randa Kattan, CEO, Arab Council Australia

Mr Tony Pang, Secretary, Chinese Australian Services Society

Mr Luke Song, Korean Society of Sydney

Mr Sotiris Tsouris, Cypriot Society of NSW

Mr George Vellis, Co-ordinator, Australian Hellenic Council

Mr Patrick Voon, President, Chinese Australian Forum

Mr Peter Wertheim, Executive Director, Executive Council of Australian Jewry