

Freedom of association threatened

IBM did not respond to questions about whether staff were free to engage with external organisations, including religious groups, outside of their employment with the company.

“We will not be responding on this,” an IBM spokeswoman said.

Rebecca Urban, The Australianⁱ

The redefinition of marriage also poses threats to freedom of association.

In September 2016, representatives of Marriage Alliance, in conjunction with a number of other groups, planned a briefing session in Sydney. The aim of the event was to provide other interested parties with information about the campaign to defend marriage in Australia.

The gathering of around 100 people was due to be held at the Mercure Hotel, Sydney Airport, but was moved to a secret location after details of the event were leaked on LGBTI website SameSame.com.au and threats were made to hotel staff. Activists also left negative reviews on the hotel’s Facebook page, which was eventually disabled.ⁱⁱ

This was not the first attempt to shut down a gathering such as this. The Hyatt Hotel in Canberra faced similar pressure when it accepted a booking to host the annual Australian Christian Lobby conference in 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ

There has also been pressure placed on individuals within companies for having associations unrelated to their employment outside of working hours. Former PricewaterhouseCoopers (**PwC**) executive Mark Allaby was forced to step down from the board of the Australian Christian Lobby after activists suggested that this did not accord with the firm’s pro-LGBTI stance. A PwC spokesperson was quoted as saying:

“When it comes to employee participation on external boards, if a conflict arises between an employee’s board role and the best interests of PwC, we would request that they step down from that board.”^{iv}

Allaby subsequently left PwC and began employment with IBM. In similar circumstances, he was also pressured to step down from the board of directors of the Lachlan Macquarie Institute (**LMI**), an organisation which offers internships to Christians considering careers in areas related to public policy. At the time, IBM refused to respond to questions about whether staff were free to engage with religious groups outside of their employment.^v

Promptly following the Allaby incident, activists turned their attention to Macquarie University professor and fellow LMI director, Dr Steven Chavura.^{vi} Chavura refused to resign from either position, but both the ACL and the LMI were forced to apply for permission to keep the composition of their respective boards private to avoid any further employment pressure. The Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits granted their request on public safety grounds – a move generally reserved for domestic violence shelters.^{vii}

The LGBTI lobby do not only try to restrict freedom of association for those connected with faith-based groups. In May 2017, Shannon Molloy, a News Limited journalist was pressured to resign his

post as a board member of the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby because some LGBTI activists considered his position at News Limited to be incompatible with LGBTI activism.^{viii}

The push to redefine marriage threatens more than just religious freedom. The most far-reaching threat is to the freedom of individuals to voice their opinion in this debate, and to associate with others who do the same.

ⁱ Urban R. Gay Rights Activists Target IBM Executive. The Australian. 21 March 2017. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/christians-under-attack-gay-rights-activists-target-ibm-executive/news-story/7e3acb1b3b1e0c81d00ba6a3a034b1d9>

ⁱⁱ Crowe D. Same-sex marriage event off: threats to hotel staff. The Australian. 17 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/samesex-marriage-event-off-threats-to-hotel-staff/news-story/d45bd0f9e9a774fc3e3d0741f176da13>

ⁱⁱⁱ McIlroy T., Westcott B. Hyatt Hotel defends booking for Australian Christian Lobby's anti-gay marriage conference. The Canberra Times. 21 October 2014. Available at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/hyatt-hotel-defends-booking-for-australian-christian-lobbys-antigay-marriage-conference-20141021-1196rn.html>

^{iv} Taylor J. PwC Exec Leaves Australian Christian Lobby. Crikey. 1 March 2016. Available at: <https://www.crikey.com.au/2016/03/01/pwc-exec-leaves-australian-christian-lobby-board/>

^v Urban R. Gay Rights Activists Target IBM Executive. The Australian. 21 March 2017. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/christians-under-attack-gay-rights-activists-target-ibm-executive/news-story/7e3acb1b3b1e0c81d00ba6a3a034b1d9>

^{vi} Higgins E. Gay rights activist slams Christian academic. The Australian. 29 March 2017. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/gay-rights-activist-michael-barnett-turns-on-christian-academic/news-story/ba36cfd3c967370371f8b9edb3f69dec>

^{vii} Shanahan D. Safety Fears at Christian Charities. The Australian. 28 March 2017. Available at: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/safety-fears-force-board-security-at-charities/news-story/2b1b9ec518c20348a045236cfd413000>

^{viii} Zhou N. News Corp journalist quits gay rights lobby's board after being 'targeted' over employer. The Guardian. 23 May 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/23/news-corp-journalist-quits-gay-rights-lobbys-board-after-being-targeted-over-employer>