



## *Policy: Religious Freedom*

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The Liberal Democrats support freedom of religion but oppose government involvement in religion including funding of programs based on religion and efforts to impose religious beliefs on others.

### **Policy**

The Liberal Democrats:

- Acknowledge the significant contribution of Christianity to liberal democratic values.
- Support the freedom of private individuals and organisations to apply religious tests for membership or employment.
- Oppose any discrimination between religious and non-religious organisations in the application of taxes.
- Would cease government funding of the National Schools Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program.
- Would cease funding of programs and bodies that cater to particular religious groups or that promote group discrimination.
- Would abolish any remaining blasphemy laws.
- Would require the holding of parliamentary prayers to be subject to majority approval by members, in each term of parliament.
- Oppose government mandated food labelling for religious purposes.
- Support equality before the law and therefore oppose introduction of laws for individual groups such as Islamic Sharia law or Aboriginal traditional law.
- Oppose restrictions on the right of individuals to wear the clothing of their choice on public property, including religious garb, subject to essential security and identity considerations, but support the right of private property owners to determine dress rules on their own property.

## Discussion

Religion should be a personal matter, and should not be interfered with by the government, however the LDP recognises that the history of Australia and the values it inherited through European settlement cannot be understood without reference to the contribution of Christianity.

The LDP is, however, opposed to those who seek to impose their religious views on the entire population, as sometimes occurs in areas such as abortion, assisted suicide, stem cell research, drug policy, lifestyle choices (same sex marriage), and education.

The LDP supports civil liberties, individual freedom and personal responsibility, and opposes attempts to restrict the freedom of others. LDP policies on social issues favour freedom of choice, even where we may not agree with the choices of others we support the right of them to make those choices.

This includes the freedom of private individuals or organisations to discriminate on religious grounds, for example while the LDP supports same-sex marriage, it also supports the right of a minister of religion to refuse to perform such marriages.

Laws should apply equally to all, and therefore laws that favour particular religions, or treat religious groups within society differently (such as blasphemy laws or support of Sharia law) should be opposed or abolished.

Although there have been advances in equality between religious and non-religious institutions, there are still various tax concessions available to religious institutions, for example GST is not payable on the cost of a religious celebrant but is for the equivalent service from a civil celebrant, and ministers of religion have special exemptions from fringe benefits tax (that ordinary employees would not have).

The LDP would seek to completely remove the government from any involvement with religion at all, ending funding for religious based programs. For example ceasing the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program, whose funding is highly skewed to religious organisations, would save \$165 million dollars per year.