

## Media Release

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### Religious freedom shouldn't override Tasmania's racism ban

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania (MCOT) has today delivered a constructive submission to the Commonwealth Government on its religious discrimination bills.

“The Multicultural Council of Tasmania is the first and only multicultural peak body in the nation to have made a submission on the religious discrimination bills,” said Mr Waqas Durrani, MCOT chair.

“The task of balancing religious freedom and freedom from racism is tricky, but we haven't put it in the too-hard-basket. Instead we have made some practical suggestions for amendments that would benefit the Australians from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds that we represent.”

The proposed *Religious Discrimination Bill* would protect a range of ‘statements of belief’, even when those statements would be unlawful under Tasmania's *Anti-Discrimination Act* or section 18C of the Commonwealth's *Racial Discrimination Act*.

“MCOT opposes this over-riding of protections against racism.”

“It undermines the ability of Tasmanians to make their own laws regarding racism.”

“It would also create an absurdity where two people could say the identical thing and one would be breaking the law, while the other, because of claims about religion, would not.”

“To work out who broke the law and who didn't, a court would be required to pry into and rule on a person's faith, and a religion's teachings.”

MCOT also opposes the exemption of religious bodies from the ban on religious discrimination when administering Commonwealth Government programs and laws.

“Taxpayers of all religions pay for Commonwealth programs. Their access to these programs should not be hindered simply because a religious body is involved in delivery.”

MCOT is the peak body representing more than 70 multicultural organisations in Tasmania.

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