



MEDIA RELEASE

20 September 2019

***Religious Discrimination Bill* would create an uneven playing field**

On Friday, 20 September 2019, Archbishop Julian Porteous alleged in the *Mercury*:

- there are no protections in Tasmania to prevent discrimination on the basis of religious belief; and
- the Federal Government's proposed *Religious Discrimination Bill* would create a 'level playing field'.

Both of these statements are false.

"Public debate on the *Religious Discrimination Bill* must be based on fact, not falsehoods," Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Sarah Bolt said.

"Tasmania's *Anti-Discrimination Act* does make discrimination on the basis of religious belief, affiliation and activity unlawful," Commissioner Bolt said.

"Discrimination on the basis of religion has been unlawful in Tasmania for over 20 years."

"Currently, the law in Tasmania treats people equally," Commissioner Bolt said. "The Federal Government's *Religious Discrimination Bill* seeks to change that."

The Bill would override the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998*. The Bill says if a person makes a statement of religious belief – this will not amount to discrimination or unlawful offensive, humiliating, intimidating, insulting or ridiculing conduct.

"The practical effect of this is everyday Tasmanians would lose protections they currently have," Commissioner Bolt says. "This is because the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal cannot deal with complaints where there is a defence available at Federal law."

Commissioner Bolt gave examples of how Tasmanians would lose protections they currently have:

- “Equal Opportunity Tasmania dealt with a complaint from a man who lost his job because he had moved in with his girlfriend. His employer found out and told the man it was his religious belief this was sinful. The employer did not want to pay wages to someone who, in his view, was living in sin. If the *Religious Discrimination Bill* was passed, this complaint would not have been able to be dealt with under the Tasmanian Act.”
- “If a blind person is denied service because they have a guide dog, they can currently make a complaint under the Tasmanian Act. If the *Religious Discrimination Bill* was passed, this could change. A taxi driver, for example, could say it is their religious belief dogs are dirty and as a result they will not allow guide dogs in their taxi.”
- “If a child with disability is bullied at school, they can currently make a complaint under the Tasmanian Act. If the *Religious Discrimination Bill* was passed, this would change if the bullies said they were stating religious beliefs.”

“The proposed *Religious Discrimination Bill* would not create a level playing field. Rather, it would give people stating religious beliefs special status and put them above the laws that apply to everybody else.”

Sarah Bolt, Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Equal Opportunity Tasmania: