

MEDIA RELEASE



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ARCHBISHOP WELCOMES GOVERNMENT PROTECTIONS

Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP has welcomed the Government's moves to safeguard religious freedom for all Australians with the announcement of new legislation to protect people of faith under anti-discrimination laws.

Archbishop Fisher said a raft of attacks on religious freedom in recent times had highlighted the need for further protections.

"We used to be live and let live on religious matters," he said. "We gave each other space to be different, but lately there has been a hard-edged secularism that wants to stamp out religion from public life," he said.

"There have been attempts to prosecute an Archbishop for upholding Catholic teachings about marriage, moves to remove the few existing religious liberty protections from our schools and attempts in some states to legislate on the Seal of Confession.

"People of faith must be able to freely practise their religion without fear."

Archbishop Fisher also welcomed the Government's intention to seek bipartisan support for the introduction of a Religious Discrimination Act.

"Prior to the marriage law being changed last year, both major parties expressed their strong commitment to religious freedom in this country. With just a handful of sitting days in this parliamentary term, I hope that both parties will work together to fulfil the promises they made last year as a matter of priority.

"I look forward to working with our parliamentarians in achieving a way forward as soon as possible."

Archbishop Fisher said that he hoped the proposed referral of matters surrounding schools to the Australian Law Reform Commission for further review would give the opportunity to reasoned consideration of the complex issues involved, including the rights of faith-based schools to maintain their ethos.

"As part of this new legislation, it is critical for Catholic schools to have the right to freely pass on our beliefs and practices to our students," he added.

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