

“Exceptions Review”  
Department of Justice,  
Level 24, 121 Exhibition Street,  
Melbourne, Vic. 3000

### **Submission Re: Exception Review Consultation – Equal Opportunity Act 1995**

The members of the Catholic Women’s League here in Victoria fully support the current Religious Exemptions within the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 and **totally oppose** any alterations to Sections 75, 76 and 77 of this Act.

Under many UN Declarations, Conventions, Treaties and international law, people have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his or her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in a community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship or observance.

This is supported by Section 14 (1 (a) and (b) and 2) of the Victorian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities Act, 2006.

To remove these exemptions would be an abuse of human rights (Refer Part 2 – 7(3) of the Charter.

While Article 15 – 3(b) covers the removal of rights to protect public ‘health or morals’ or the ‘fundamental rights and freedom’ of others, it should be noted and recognised that Christian teachings actually protect the health and morals of young people.

Governments continue to educate the youth with regards to the dangers of smoking, binge drinking, drugs and gambling all of which take a toll on their health and the health budget while at the same time schools are expected to employ teachers who promote an unhealthy lifestyle which can lead to HIV and AIDS along with many other STIs.

Australia ratified the ICCPR in 1980. Article 18: 4 states “The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Therefore, we strongly urge the Review Committee to maintain an independent and impartial viewpoint (rather than an entrenched one) when it comes to making a decision on this very important human right.

We therefore believe that it is in the best interest of all Australians **to maintain the status quo** on the religious exemptions in the E.O. Act 1995 which will ensure the rights of Victorians and especially the Christian community, to exercise genuine religious freedom.

Any law which does not appropriately regard the provisions of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia -Sections 116 which states in part –“or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion”- is **‘ULTRA VIRES’**.

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