



Liberals Refuse to Heed Lessons from WA Electoral Hiding

The Turnbull government's decision to change Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act has been condemned by the Ethnic Communities Council of WA. "ECCWA has always championed Free Speech but the Turnbull government's proposal to supposedly strengthen Section 18C by substituting the words 'insult', 'offend' and 'humiliate' with 'harass', is repugnant and unconscionable. It's beyond belief that this was being announced on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination", said Council President, Ramdas Sankaran

"It is astounding that within 10 days of the Liberals receiving an colossal electoral hiding from WA voters for their unholy preference deal with One Nation (which espouses discriminatory policies), and within a day of announcing their statement on multiculturalism, Prime Minister Turnbull, is seeking to make the aforementioned changes", he added.

"Harass infers connotations such as pester, badger, persecute etc. all which involve repeated actions on the part of those who 'insult', 'offend' and 'humiliate'. Under the current provisions of 18c such repeated actions are not required for the action to be punishable. Such a change will embolden the likes of Chris Nelson who was a member of the Liberal Party who posted the following on Facebook "Nova f___ off. You were only endorsed by Julia because you were a black c___. Go back to the bush and suck on Witchity grubs and yams. Stop painting your f___ face with white s___ in parliament. Other than being a runner you are nothing"

"So Prime Minster, how many times must a person be 'insulted', 'offended' and 'humiliated' on the basis of their race, aboriginality etc. in the aforementioned manner before such actions are deemed to be harassment and the provisions of 18c are invoked? If according to Mr. Turnbull, multiculturalism is the glue that hold our society together, his proposed changes to 18c is the acetone, which will eliminate that glue", said Mr. Sankaran.

Mr. Turnbull, boasts that we are the most successful multicultural society in the world, built on a society of mutual respect," and if he is fair dinkum; how can he possibly justify making it legal to 'insult', 'offend' and 'humiliate' people on the basis of their race, ethnicity, aboriginality etc." asked Mr. Sankaran?

Mr Turnbull has admitted that he did not have plans to change the act when elected and throughout the 2016 federal election campaign he and his colleagues argued that, this was not an issue of concern. So this is not about high-profile cases involving [Queensland University of Technology students](#) and [cartoonist Bill Leak](#) but appeasing his backbenchers", he added.

"We commend Dy. Prime Minster Barnaby Joyce, who warned that, 'essentially, voters are not concerned about section 18C but are more concerned about day to day issues and that the Coalition should stop talking about the issue'. The Liberals should heed his advice."

"Our Council welcomes the Government's proposal to insert a 'reasonable person' test which will give the Human Rights Commission more power to knock back vexatious claims, or those with little prospect of success, at an earlier stage. We recommended this change in our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Free Speech. However, there is no evidence that changes are required to section 18c and we will add our voice to those of other ethnic and indigenous communities and organisations like GetUp and campaign vigorously to ensure these changes are not supported in the Senate", said Mr. Sankaran.

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