

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 919
RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL:
'DON'T DIVIDE US'**

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has told the Rationalist Society of Australia that he does not want the debate over the Religious Discrimination Bill to become “a divisive issue” for the country.

In a letter sent late last month (see below), Mr Morrison said that Australia was “an exemplar of acceptance and tolerance”.

“Like you, it is my strong preference not to see this become a divisive issue in our country. To this end, I thank you for your continued patience and grace,” he said.

Here is the letter from the Prime Minister Scott Morrison on 29 December 2021

Dear Dr Doig

For so many Australians, faith is the cornerstone of our lives and a source of great strength for our community.

The ability to live in a country where you could live your faith free from persecution is one of the primary reasons many choose to make Australia their home. I am resolute in keeping this promise of freedom to all Australians.

At the last election, I committed to promoting a more tolerant, multicultural, multi-faith, liberal democracy by fixing this important weakness in our discrimination laws.

In the final week of Parliament this year, we introduced legislation to create a Religious Discrimination Act. This Act will provide genuine protections against Australians being discriminated against because of their faith and beliefs.

Until now there has been no standalone legislation to protect people of religion or faith against discrimination – or indeed for those who choose not to have a religion or faith.

Australia is an exemplar of acceptance and tolerance. This Act would ensure that Australians have the freedom to practice their faith, that religious schools can uphold the tenets of their beliefs and the ethos that makes their school a community.

While the Act still faces challenges on the floor of Parliament from other parties who choose not to allow it to pass the House of Representatives before Parliament concluded this year, I and my Government remain committed to its success and to supporting Australians of faith.

I thank you and the many people, from individuals of faith through to the leaders of broader religious groups, who have provided constructive feedback in the process of developing this Act. Like you, it is my strong preference not to see this become a divisive issue in our country. To this end, I thank you for your continued patience and grace.

Together with the support of you and your community, we will stand strong and continue to protect Australia's status as the most inclusive, tolerant, and multicultural place in the world.

Best wishes for a peaceful and prosperous 2022.

Yours sincerely

SCOTT MORRISON

In response, RSA president Meredith Doig has urged the Prime Minister to withdraw his support for the bill because it is already causing division.

“You write in your letter that Australia is the ‘most inclusive, tolerant and multicultural place in the world’. And I tend to agree. Which is why you need to do, we need to do, everything we can to keep it that way,” she said in a video published on her @MeredithDoig Twitter account.

“Prime Minister, don’t do it – don’t keep pushing this divisive and unnecessary bill. Don’t divide us.”

The Rationalist Society of Australia is among 11 freethought and pro-secular groups who, as part of the [#DontDivideUs campaign](#), are opposing the bill in its current form because of concern about the widespread division it will cause.

In her video, Dr Doig said the bill is not only dividing religious and non-religious Australians but also pitting religious fundamentalists against progressive people of faith.

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