

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 890
LUKE BECK WEBINAR
AND SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY PROGRAMS**

On 27 April, 2021, the Rationalist Society hosted a webinar on Government Chaplaincy Programs in which Professor Luke Beck from Monash University gave a summary of their history and actions being taken to make them less discriminatory.

The DOGS have always opposed chaplaincy programs in public schools since we believe that they offend the principle of separation of religion from the State. Pastoral work, they consider should be done by well qualified teachers who are appointed as guidance officers in public schools. The religious beliefs of such guidance officers was irrelevant to their appointment. These roles were performed by well qualified personnel in the past but in cost cutting exercises, such appointments have been replaced by Commonwealth funded chaplaincy programs.

Beck differs from the DOGS position and takes a non-preferential position. He considers that these ‘Pastoral’ positions should be open to those of non-Christian religion and/or no religion at all.

What are Chaplaincy Programs

They are an invention of the Howard Government. The Federal Government provides money to the States on condition they use it to pay for school chaplains in accordance with broad guidelines set by the federal government itself. Schools can apply to the State Education Department to participate but the appointments are arranged through outsourcing. Schools enter into a contract with a chaplaincy provider who actually hires the chaplain. But the chaplain works in the school under the direction of the school principal.

The problem is that all the job ads for chaplain positions in public schools require job applicants to be Christian, even though religious discrimination in employment is unlawful in most States.

Beck notes that the job title “chaplain” is misleading. The work is not about religion but about spiritual care, pastoral care or social health, providing emotional and social support to people in schools, hospitals, defence forces, prisons, and emergency services. Beck is not against such programs but believes

“people with non-religious beliefs should have the same opportunities to access like-minded pastoral care as people with religious beliefs, and people with non-religious beliefs should have the same opportunities to provide that care.”

To hear what Beck has to say about the current situation and what the Rationalist Society is doing about it, listen to the DOGS program for 15 May on 3CR . The following are the Powerpoint slides from the Rationalist webinar itself.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dZmmRxT7jJ-pCODLrHoma8iL1SeSkUO/view?link_id=1&can_id=cd3f9ec3f17c6a028f6c5cfa3e19096f&source=email-thank-you-for-attending-the-rsa-webinar&email_referrer=email_1160745&email_subject=thank-you-for-attending-the-rsa-webinar

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