

# **FECCA Chairperson Mr Joe Caputo OAM gives evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' Inquiry into Freedom of Speech in Australia**

Chairperson of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) Mr Joe Caputo OAM, acting in his capacity of Board Director of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), today gave evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' Inquiry into Freedom of Speech in Australia.

In his evidence, Mr Caputo stated that 'Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, as it is, is crucial to maintain our social cohesion.'

'ECCV wants to see the Government strengthen 18C – not weaken it,' he continued.

Mr Caputo stated, 'ECCV is particularly concerned about the increase of hostility toward Muslims and other minority groups in Australia. In recent years there has been a rise in anti-multiculturalism rallies and racist attacks which promote feelings of exclusion and fear in the community.'

He further commented to the Committee, 'Section 18C needs to be strengthened by including 'religion' to reflect the currently high levels of discrimination aimed at some culturally diverse communities'.

Mr Caputo expressed concern that the Inquiry's terms of reference threaten Australia's social cohesion and harm Australia's international reputation as a strong, successful multicultural and multi-faith community.

'This is an important juncture in Australian history and ECCV implores all parliamentarians to take full responsibility for the wording in their terms of reference and in their public comments,' he said.

ECCV is a state-wide peak advocacy member-based organisation that represents ethnic and multicultural organisations and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. ECCV has over 200 ethnic organisations affiliated and active in its network.

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. FECCA's role is to advocate and promote issues on behalf of its constituency to government, business and the broader community.

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