

Attempts to weaken 18C threaten strength of RDA for multicultural Australia

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) opposes attempts to amend and weaken Section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

Section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act* provides important protection against racially motivated attacks, including hate speech, against members of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

FECCA Acting Chairperson Eugenia Grammatikakis said, "Attacks against CALD communities have increased in recent years, causing distress for the individuals and communities affected, while promoting exclusion and fear."

The *Racial Discrimination Act* attempts to strike a balance between the right to freedom from racial vilification and the right of freedom of expression. FECCA opposes the proposal to remove the words "insult" and "offend" from section 18C of the legislation.

Section 18D sets out exemptions to ensure that conduct will not be unlawful where done reasonably and in good faith (that is, in the performance, exhibition, artistic work; for any genuine academic, artistic or scientific purpose, or any other genuine purpose in the public interest).

FECCA believes that the 2014 debate on this issue was extensive and does not need to be re-opened. There was an overwhelming community response against changes to the *Racial Discrimination Act*; with thousands of community members and their organisations expressing alarm that the then proposed repeal of 18C, would strip protection from the most marginalised members of our society and threaten social cohesion in Australia.

"FECCA reiterates our opposition to any amendment of 18C that would see a weakening of provisions that are crucial to ensuring harmony, by protecting vulnerable groups. We continue to stress the importance of the Australia's diverse society in coming together to foster community harmony and cohesion", said Ms Grammatikakis.

Media Comments: FECCA Office – (02) 6282 5755 or media@fecca.org.au.