

MEDIA RELEASE – 06.08.2014

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Government decision on 18C at odds with counter-terrorism powers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) welcomes Prime Minister Tony Abbott's announcement of the retention of 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

This decision means the rights of all citizens to be free of vilification on the grounds of cultural identity will continue to be upheld by Law.

AASW National President Karen Healy says: "The AASW was among many groups in civil society who raised concerns about the proposed repeal of 18C.

"The protections provided by 18C are vital for our multi-cultural society. However the government needs to listen to the deeper message of the 5000 submissions it received - that Australians don't like the division and hurt that racial discrimination causes."

The AASW is therefore uneasy that the decision to retain 18C was announced at the same time as the government conveyed its intention to extend its counter-terrorism powers in a way which is effectively racially based.

The AASW acknowledges the responsibility of government to prevent terrorism. However, these very significant infringements of citizen's rights relating to mandatory data retention and surveillance are out of proportion to the actual threat that Australia is currently experiencing.

The decision may result in vulnerable people not seeking confidential advice and help via telephone or internet based support services. The AASW asks that the government consult broadly and respectfully with the Australian public to prevent further racial division and unnecessary incursions into citizens' rights to privacy.

Media Contact:

Laura Edwards

Media and Communications Officer

P: (02) 6232 3911 or 0400 613 516
