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Submission of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia on the proposal to replace the parliamentary prayer with an invitation to prayer or reflection

Captain Tanya Watkins

Mr Richard Pye
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Thank you for giving the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue.

Who we are

We are a fast growing, but minority, religious group who believe in equality, freedom, safety and acceptance of everyone. We believe in celebrating the fact that each one of us is here. We believe that what any number of consenting adults do in their own time is none of our business. We believe we have a religious calling to point out and correct any bigotry we witness. We believe it is a really wonderful thing to want to help your fellow humans, and that when it comes to improving another's quality of life, every small advancement is precious.

The issue

Senator Lee Rhiannon has proposed replacing the Christian prayers read out at the start of each Senate sitting day with a more general statement of prayer and reflection.

According to Senate Standing Order 50, the following is read out at the start of each day:

Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to vouchsafe Thy special blessing upon this Parliament, and that Thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper the work of Thy servants to the advancement of Thy glory, and to the true welfare of the people of Australia.

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia believes changes to Standing Order 50 are long overdue.

Standing Order 50 does not reflect the religious diversity of Australia

Although our present society has a Judeo-Christian basis, Australians are no longer a universally Christian people. Therefore, a Christian prayer is unsuitable to be offered as an expression of a shared value held by our representatives in the Senate or by the population of Australia. The last census recorded the total number of Christians at approximately 52%. Almost half of all Australians subscribe to other belief systems, including 30% who record no religious beliefs.

Standing Order 50 does not reflect the religious diversity of Senators and goes against Article 18.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

If we assume that the elected representatives in the Senate reflect the diversity of the Australian population then we clearly have a situation in Australia where a Senator is being compelled to recite a prayer of a belief that they may not hold. This goes against Article 18.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states;

‘No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice.’

Privileging one faith is exclusionary of other faiths and none

If a Senator is compelled to recite the Lord’s Prayer, which is overtly part of the Protestant branch of Christianity, to represent the citizens that elected them to that position then that severely infringes upon their right to hold a different belief, whether that be a differing religious or non-religious belief. It also reflects to the general population that only Protestant Christian members of society are being represented by our Senators.

Standing Order 50 does not accurately reflect the purpose of the Senate

A silent prayer or reflection, as proposed by Senator Lee Rhiannon, will allow all people who identify as Christian, Muslim, Pastafarian, humanist, atheist, agnostic, pagan, the spiritual but not religious, and all other religious and non-religious categories, to feel that the Senate is also representative of them. The focus of the work of the Senate then becomes the Senators responsibility to represent all the population of Australia, as it should be under our secular Government.

Kind regards,

Captain Tanya Watkins

Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia