

The following submission to this review has been received

2. To what extent do you think the community is aware of and understands: a. the Act and how it works b. what change or suppression practices are and c. the harm caused by change or suppression practices

In my experience, there is limited community understanding of the Act and its practical implications. Many people of faith do not clearly understand what is meant by a change or suppression practice.

There is widespread uncertainty about whether ordinary religious activities may fall within the scope of the Act. This includes:

- preaching or teaching traditional beliefs about sexuality or gender
- providing pastoral care or spiritual guidance when requested
- praying with or for a person who seeks such prayer
- supporting individuals who freely choose celibacy for religious reasons
- conversations between parents and children about faith and moral convictions

This lack of clarity has produced fear and confusion within churches and families. Some leaders and parents feel pressure to avoid important conversations or spiritual support even when these are sought voluntarily.

While it is important to prevent coercive or harmful conduct, the current legal framework appears to create uncertainty about lawful and compassionate religious practice. In my view, this uncertainty itself has had a negative impact on community wellbeing and freedom of belief.

6. Is greater clarity needed about how people of faith can hold and express their beliefs to support clear understanding and compliance with the Act? What forms of clarification would be most helpful?

Greater clarity is needed about how people of faith can hold and express their beliefs.

Freedom of religion includes the ability to teach, discuss and practise sincerely held beliefs in community. It also includes the ability to provide pastoral care and prayer where this is freely requested.

The present law does not sufficiently distinguish between coercive conduct and voluntary religious activity. Without clearer guidance, individuals and organisations may restrict legitimate religious expression in order to avoid potential legal risk.

The law should make clear that the following are lawful when undertaken without coercion or pressure:

- religious teaching about doctrine and ethics

- prayer or spiritual support that is requested by the individual
- pastoral conversations aimed at helping a person live consistently with their beliefs
- parental guidance grounded in sincerely held religious convictions

Providing this clarity would help ensure that the Act protects vulnerable people from harm while also safeguarding fundamental freedoms of belief, speech and association.

