

MEDIA RELEASE



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Race hate protections must remain

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights organisation ANTaR today again called for race hate protections under the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) to remain unchanged following the release of the so called Freedom of Speech Inquiry Report last night.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that the Inquiry was unnecessary given that the RDA underwent a similar inquiry in 2014, but welcomed the fact that the Committee had not recommended changing race hate protections.

"More than one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced racism in the last six months according to the recently released Reconciliation Barometer and it has a serious impact on health and wellbeing. It beggars belief that watering down race hate protection is being discussed yet again given the extensive Inquiry held in 2014, and the rise in racism reported in Barometer and elsewhere."

"The community yet again spoke up during this Inquiry in support of keeping race hate protections in place. Government must now finally heed those views and put the issue to rest."

"Former Prime Minister Abbott said he dropped changes to the RDA in 2014 to preserve national unity following a similar response from the community. The only thing that's changed since then is that racism is on the increase," Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan expressed concern about the recommendations that present serious access to justice issues for those wishing to make a complaint, especially in relation to cost impediments to complainants.

"No changes should be made that make it harder to make a complaint," he said.

Mr Meehan welcomed the recommendations regarding supporting, strengthening and developing education programs addressing racism, and explaining the Racial Discrimination Act, and in relation to the Australian community and politicians exercising their freedom of speech to identify and condemn racially hateful and discriminatory speech where it occurs in public.

"It's clear we need more leadership from many of our parliamentarians, starting with the Prime Minister, to speak up in support of an inclusive, respectful and non-discriminatory society, rather than rush to appease the out of touch views of fringe MPs," he said.

ANTaR is the only non-Indigenous organisation dedicated solely to supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working to educate the wider community, shape public opinion, and speak up for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples.