



ABN 91323005375

“Behold the Miracle of Creation”

Combating Child Sexual Exploitation Legislation Amendment Bill 2019

4 March 2019

**“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,
and whoever receives me,
receives not me but him who sent me.”**

Mark 9:37

1. Introduction

The Catholic Women's League Australia Inc. (CWLA) is the national peak body representing the League's six member organisations located throughout Australia. We are a Non-Government Organisation and have consultative (roster) status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We are also a member of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO). One of CWLA's four principle aims is to influence legislative and administrative bodies at all levels of government in order to preserve the dignity of the human person.

**All Correspondence to Catholic Women's League Australia (Inc)
PO Box 458, Australind, WA 6233**

2. Catholic Social Teachings

The CWLA looks to the Catholic Church’s social teaching, which we believe to be a rich source of wisdom and guidance about building a just society and living an ethical life amidst the challenges of modern society. Our social teachings are articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. One important social teaching theme relates to that of the Common Good, which can be explained as “the principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people”. According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily"ⁱ. We believe that this teaching speaks directly to the issue of child abuse and the protection of children. The issue of child abuse stops children from reaching their full potential. It is on these grounds that we believe in putting our efforts behind amending legislation to protect children by participating in this inquiry.

3. Explanatory Memorandum

According to the explanatory memorandum for this bill, the reasons for the proposed amendments are as follows:

“2. The Bill implements a number of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) by:

- creating an offence of failure to protect a child at risk of a child sexual abuse offence
- creating an offence of failure to report a child sexual abuse offence
- strengthening overseas persistent child sexual abuse laws
- criminalise the possession or control of child pornography material or child abuse material in the form of data that has been obtained or accessed using a carriage service

- prevent certain dealings with child-like sex dolls
- criminalise the possession of child-like sex dolls
- improve the definition of forced marriage, and
- restrict the defence based on a valid and genuine marriage to overseas child sex offences.

The Catholic Women's League of Australia would like to express its full support for the proposed amendments put forward in this bill. The proposed amendments support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and thus indicates a seriousness towards implementing and incorporating these issues into legislation. The CWLA takes its commitment towards advocating for the human rights of women and children seriously. We believe that having knowledge of children being abused and not acting on that knowledge should be an offence. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory, is an international human rights convention applying to all children throughout the world.

We agree that even though overseas law may permit very young children to marry this should remain a crime in this country and a defence of overseas, authorised marriage should not be permitted. We agree that child-like sex dolls is another way of encouraging child abuse against actual children and is, in of itself, a form of child pornography. Clarity with regards to what is meant by forced marriage should be provided, to ensure that the highest standards of protection of children is attained via our child protection legislation.

On these grounds we fully support the proposed changes outlined in this Bill and wish to thank the Committee for its work in attempting to bring these changes to the current legislation.

We wish the committee every success in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Valma Ivory

National President

Catholic Women's League Australia
