



Date: 7 December 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Re: Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill 2012.

I would like to object to the inclusion of *political opinions* as a protected attribute under the proposed new law.

The Bill prohibits discrimination by unfavourable treatment – treatment defined but not limited to “(a) harassing the other person (b) other conduct that offends, insults or intimidates the other person”. Almost every political opinion can be deemed offensive or insulting to someone because that is the nature of politics. The inclusion of *political opinions* as a protected attribute erases our fundamental freedom of thought and is the complete antithesis of what it means to live in a democracy. Enacting laws of this nature will effectively legislate division between Australians by censoring political discussion between people. We are fast becoming a nation lacking in tolerance or civility towards those with whom we disagree with and as a society we are showing a steady decline in demonstrating any form of resilience towards others who have hurt, offended or insulted us. Underlying prejudices are not addressed by offering more avenues of litigation against people whose opinion someone may find offensive or insulting. Airing the issues and dealing with them outside of a legal process, best addresses prejudices. The introduction of *political opinions* as a protected attribute will only contribute to a more litigious workplace environment and must be rejected.

Australia should be a nation that encourages freedom and open debate rather than suppression and silence through outlawing offensive and insulting speech.

Sincerely,

Tina Vartis