

# Australian Greens Dissenting Report

The Australian Greens firmly believe that the current prayer, which has been read each sitting day since 1901, is outdated and no longer reflective of Australia's religiously diverse and secular society.

In 1901, 97% of Australians identified as Christian. Today we are a far more diverse society. As of the last census in 2016, only 52% of the population identified as Christian.

As the National Secular Lobby notes in its submission:

“In the 2016 census, “No religion” was, for the first time ever, the most popular individual response given to the question of religious affiliation. Australia today has a significantly more varied and less religious population that no longer relies exclusively on a Christian concept of morality for guidance. It is therefore no longer appropriate for our senators, many of whom are themselves atheist, agnostic or followers of non-Christian faiths, to be called to order with an entreaty to a Christian God.”

The Catholic Women's League Australian Inc supports this view, stating:

“We also recognise that in an increasingly secular society not all Australian citizens chose to pray. Such an amendment recognises the diversity in spiritual and religious beliefs and is a positive development. Therefore a space for them to reflect is important too, and provides an opportunity of mindfulness for every person engaged in Parliamentary work.”

This view is supported by the Council of Australian Humanist Societies, which comments in its submission:

“The current prayer is unrepresentative of the diversity of beliefs of the Australian community that MPs are elected to represent.”

It is clear that the Lord's Prayer is no longer appropriate for the representative body of a religiously diverse society. Nor is it appropriate for a proud secular society. It is the Greens strong view that the Australian Parliament should uphold our secular values, and not have those important values undermined at the beginning of each sitting day with the Lord's Prayer.

The proposal put forward by the Greens, of an invitation to prayer or reflection, is based on the opening statement read at the start of each sitting day in the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, which was adopted in 1995.

The Leader of the Australian Greens Senator Richard Di Natale summarised the reasons for the Greens' pursuit of change in 2014, in relation to a similar proposal put forward by the Greens. He said:

“We are doing this because we live in a country where there is a clear separation between church and state. We live in a country of many different

faiths - in fact, a country where many people have no faith - and a modern Australian Parliament should reflect that. We do say that there should be some opportunity for reflection or, indeed, prayer, if people feel that way, and that is why we would like to see a minute at the start of each day in this place being offered for that reason.”

### **Recommendation**

- 1. The Australian Greens recommend that the requirement for prayer under standing order 50 be replaced with an invitation to prayer or reflection.**

**Senator Rachel Siewert**

**The Australian Greens**