

Submission:
*Criminal Code (Child Sexual
Offences Reform) and other
Legislation Amendment Bill 2019*

AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN LOBBY

About Australian Christian Lobby

Australian Christian Lobby's vision is to see Christian principles and ethics influencing the way we are governed, do business, and relate to each other as a community. ACL seeks to see a compassionate, just and moral society through having the public contributions of the Christian faith reflected in the political life of the nation. With more than 170,000 supporters, ACL facilitates professional engagement and dialogue between the Christian constituency and government, allowing the voice of Christians to be heard in the public square. ACL is neither party-partisan nor denominationally aligned. ACL representatives bring a

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Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane Qld 4000
lacsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

6 January 2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of the Australian Christian Lobby, I thank the Government for the opportunity to make a submission to the Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. We agree with the Attorney General's statement in her introductory remarks that child sexual abuse is not something that can be ignored by any adult.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information or clarification. I would also welcome any opportunity to appear before the committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W Francis', is positioned above the typed name.

Wendy Francis
State Director Qld and NT

Introduction

ACL supports all efforts to protect children from all forms of sexual abuse.

The proposed legislations goes some way towards protecting children, particularly from sexual abuse. However, the legislation does not protect children from exposure to materials, often displayed in public places, that may make children sexually confused and curious and thereby easy targets for exploitative adults. It is essential that there be a uniform approach to removing all sources of physical, psychological and sexual abuse of children. Parents and carers regularly feel powerless to know how to report static sexual abuse which affects their children in public places.

Banning of child-like sex toys

We commend the proposed outlawing of child-like sex toys by this legislation. This objectification of children is distressing, but it is part of a continuum in which the objectification of women in the same way is somehow acceptable. It is distressing that children and women are objectified and that relationships and sex can be reduced to interactions with moulded plastic.

The importation and manufacture of all such sex toys should be banned.

Sexualisation of Children

With devastating consequences, the sexualisation of children in our society is becoming increasingly commonplace. Children are themselves being sexualised, and also are being exposed to confusing sexual messaging in the public domain at a younger and younger age, often in situations where parents and guardians are powerless to protect them.

It is important to analyse cultural representations of gender roles, sexuality and relationships and ask what specific values are being promoted and if these are having a negative impact on child development. Key questions include the impact on children... the long term impacts of early exposure to adult sexual themes and the ways in which cultural exposure impacts on parents' roles in protecting and educating their children around sexuality in a developmentally appropriate way.¹

Sexualised messaging is contributing to confusion, curiosity and experimentation. Children are exposed to concepts which they are not developmentally prepared to handle.

A report commissioned for the British Department of Education in 2011 describes it [sexualisation] as the "wallpaper" of children's lives. "We are all living in an increasingly sexual and sexualised culture, although it is far from clear how we arrived at this point," says the report, titled Letting Children Be Children. "The rapidly changing technological environment has its benefits in so many ways but has also made the seamier side of humanity inescapable."²

¹ Newman, L. The Psychological and Developmental Impact of Sexualisation on Children, in Tankard Reist M *Getting real: challenging the sexualisation of girls*, North Melbourne, Vic. : Spinifex Press, 2009.

² <https://www.smh.com.au/national/stealing-the-innocence-of-children-20130301-2fboe.html>

1. Exposure to pornography

Most children first see pornography by accident. A current Federal Government inquiry is investigating the possibility of mandating age verification processes for accessing pornographic material. With such a system, if a child stumbles across a site that has age-verification controls in place, they will be prevented from seeing content which is not appropriate for them. Children are often more skilled than their parents and guardians in their abilities with online technologies, but do not have the maturity to make appropriate decisions about access to inappropriate sites. The need to protect children is noted by the Australian Psychological Society:

*Despite their ability to effectively use online technologies, children and young people still need protection from content that exploits their immaturity and could harm their development. Viewing highly sexualised or violent pornographic material has many risks for children's psychological development and mental health, by potentially skewing their views of normality and acceptable behaviour at a crucial time of development.*³

Age-verification is one way to help parents address the issue of online safety. However, state governments and local councils should also place filters on internet access points within their offices, libraries and other public places.

2. Advertising in public places

Children are constantly being exposed to inappropriate sexual messaging in shopping centres and even on their school buses. These areas fall within the jurisdiction of state and local governments. The Advertising Standards watchdog has classified at least 20 different shopping centre ads by Honey Birdette as being sexually inappropriate in public spaces, but because of loopholes, they continue to flaunt the rules without penalty and in doing so, they endanger our children.⁴ Even school buses contribute to the sexualisation of children through messaging in relation to Sexpo advertisements.⁵ These loopholes need to be closed.

The Queensland Government has an opportunity to lead by example by controlling the messaging on their own property. We draw your attention to the Government's response to petition number 3154-19 tabled on 14/11/19:

The issue of sexualised advertising was also raised as a concern during public consultation to inform development of the Framework. A comprehensive whole-of-government action plan will be developed next year. Actions to reduce harm to children as a result of exposure to sexualised advertising could be considered under Priority Area 1 — Prevention, in particular to challenge attitudes, practices and structures that lead to sexual violence, and to equip children with accurate information on healthy relationships and sexual violence. Where advertisers consistently refuse to uphold community standards with respect to sexually

³ <https://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2015/april/sampson>

⁴ <https://mumbrella.com.au/honey-birdette-has-20th-ad-banned-by-ad-standards-547542>

⁵ <https://www.news.com.au/finance/business/media/brisbane-sexpo-ads-running-on-school-buses-billboards/news-story/a8a5b1520d387c7513d4f8b4071f34c9>

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explicit advertising, the Palaszczuk Government is committed to taking appropriate enforcement action.⁶

Recommendations:

It is essential that there be a uniform approach to removing all sources of physical, psychological and sexual abuse of children including the sexualisation of children in the media and public places.

This legislation should include advertising on public transport, billboards and public places as well as collaboration with Federal government to stop child access to pornography through online age verification and other measures.

⁶ <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/petitions/closed-petitions>