



Speech By  
**Peter Russo**


**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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Record of Proceedings, 8 November 2016

**MOTION**

**Racial Discrimination Act**

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (6.17 pm): I rise in this House to oppose the motion that calls for the reform of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. It is indeed a sad day for Queensland and for the people of the Mansfield electorate. I wonder what the people of the electorate of Mansfield who have diverse backgrounds are thinking. The member for Mansfield is backing the hard right of the Liberal National Party. He is doing the Turnbull government's bidding. Perhaps it is the member for Mansfield who is manoeuvring to get the Senate vacancy and not the member for Southport. Or is the member for Mansfield simply doing the bidding of Senator Brandis?

In 2004, I remember being part of a gathering at the Wellers Hill Bowls Club with Graham Perrett, the member for Moreton, the Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC and concerned members of the community to show their concern about what the Abbott government was trying to do to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. Recently, the federal shadow Attorney-General, Mark Dreyfus said—

Labor fought back against the last push to abolish 18C under Tony Abbott and George Brandis when they declared people had a right to be bigots. Australians were appalled then, and they will mark down this government again for pursuing its own ideological agenda instead of looking at the big issues affecting our nation.

It is interesting to note that Prime Minister Turnbull lacks the ability to pull his party into line. Does the same apply to the member for Clayfield? Is it time that Queenslanders and the Australian public had the reassurance that racist hate speech is not acceptable under any government?

The federal government has signalled that it will support a parliamentary inquiry into section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. I understand that this afternoon that is what has occurred. The motion before the House tonight is doing the Turnbull government's bidding to add support to this inquiry. I repeat that I am opposed to the motion as outlined and submitted to the House this morning. The honourable Tony Burke has stated that the inquiry into section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act will not be an honest investigation of how section 18C works. He has asked that we not be fooled. I also ask the members of this House not to be fooled by the motion moved by the member for Mansfield. This motion is an attempt to support the moves in Canberra to water down laws against hate speech. The shadow minister for citizenship and multicultural Australia, Tony Burke, had this to say—

We need them to make clear what is it that they want to be allowed to say that is currently not permitted. What forms of hate speech do they want to see made legal? The last thing Australia needs is more hate speech.

The motion is an attempt to support opening the door to watering down race hate laws. Yesterday in the House of Representatives the member for Moreton spoke on this very issue opposite to what this motion is asking the House to do tonight. He said that, in relation to the matter involving the QUT students, the proceedings were brought by Ms Prior who was entitled to bring the proceedings no matter what the Human Rights Commission did with her complaint. The respondents were entitled to seek to

have her claims against them dismissed by the Federal Circuit Court, which is what happened. Mr Perrett, the member for Moreton, went on to say the decision is an example of the section working as it is designed to so that only claims that are reasonably likely to give rise to offence, insult, humiliation or intimidation are proceeded with. Claims that are mere slight are not and that is what the court actually decided. There is no doubt that finding the balance between free speech and protections against certain types of speech is sometimes a difficult endeavour. I oppose the motion moved by the member of Mansfield.