



#BetterLaws4SafeQld

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MEDIA RELEASE:

New campaign launched this week to strengthen Queensland's vilification laws

A new campaign launched this week aims to strengthen the legal protections from vilification and hate crimes for Queensland's diverse ethnic and religious communities.

The #BetterLaws4SafeQld campaign is being launched by the Cohesive Communities Coalition, a collective of organisations representing more than 20 of Queensland's diverse communities.

The campaign aims to address the gap in current protections, better deal with the distribution or display of hate materials or hate symbols, improve reporting, and help grow community confidence and safety.

Currently there is no criminal offence for vilification unless it involves threatening to harm a person or their property or inciting another person to do so. The existing offence does not address the majority of harassment experienced by diverse communities in Queensland.

"Queensland's current laws on hate speech don't provide enough protection for our richly diverse communities, who regularly face vilification on our streets, in our neighbourhoods, online, and in the media," says Ali Kadri of the Islamic Council of Queensland.

"The changes we're seeking are based on real life case studies where the law has let Queenslanders down."

The launch of the campaign has come after Covid-19 and the widely publicised wave of racially motivated incidents, firstly directed at members of Asian communities, and more recently the Brisbane African community.

"Sadly, hate crime and vilification aren't new issues for Queensland – or indeed Australia more broadly," says Akashika Mohla from Gandhi Salt March Ltd, the organisation which holds the annual Power of Peace Festival.

"The laws we currently have in place have been there for almost 20 years and clearly aren't working to address the problems which our communities are facing every day. The stories each of hear from our communities are just some of what is happening on a much broader scale, across the state."

Vilification is unlawful under Queensland's *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*. There have only ever been a handful of criminal prosecutions.

"Many people say they don't report their experiences – to police or anywhere else – and the main reasons for that can be loosely grouped into two main categories," says Umesh Chandra, president of the Queensland Multicultural Council.

"Firstly, the practical difficulties associated with reporting - such as not knowing the identity of the perpetrator, or not knowing where or how to report - and secondly, low levels of confidence within the community that reporting is worthwhile, or will lead to positive outcomes."

The campaign is supported by the Queensland Human Rights Commission, one of the bodies which handles vilification complaints.

"We see fairly small numbers of formal complaints about racial or religious vilification lodged with us at the Commission – an average of fewer than eight a year," says Scott McDougall, Queensland's Human Rights Commissioner.

"We know that's only a fraction of the number of incidents which take place. Community surveys do show the majority of people who are targeted by hate speech don't report their experiences, and that one of the reasons is that some people feel their experiences of this are so frequent that they don't see the point in reporting it. That should distress all of us, and it's one of the things we hope this campaign will help change."

The campaign website at www.betterlawsforsafeqld.com.au details the changes the coalition are seeking in more detail.

"It is our strongly held belief that these changes will be positive not only for the people and groups directly affected, but for Queensland as a whole," says Peter Forday, chair of Multicultural Australia.

"Stronger protections against hate crime and vilification will help build a Queensland where everyone feels safe and welcome. We are such a diverse state, and that diversity needs to be celebrated. It is one of our strengths, and we are stronger together."

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