



Executive Council of Australian Jewry Inc.

Historic meeting between PM and faith community leaders **5 August 2019**

In an historic meeting in Sydney on Monday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison met with 21 leaders of major faith communities in Australia to discuss progress in the government's plans to introduce a Religious Discrimination Bill later this year (see picture). The Jewish, Catholic, Anglican, Uniting Church, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Greek Orthodox, Coptic, Assyrian and Melkite communities were among those represented at the meeting.

ECAJ co-CEO Peter Wertheim, who represented the Jewish community, hailed the meeting.

"There cannot be many other countries in the world in which the head of government can have a constructive conversation over one and a half hours with such a diverse range of faith community leaders on as sensitive a topic as religious freedom and discrimination," he said.

"Each of us outlined what was of importance to our respective communities not only with regard to the proposed legislation but also in terms of Australia's broader cultural attitudes with regard to religion", Wertheim said.

"There was a large measure of agreement in the room about many of the principles that the government is grappling with in seeking a fair and workable balance between religious freedom and competing rights and freedoms. This sends a positive message to the world about how effectively Australia operates as a multi-faith and multicultural society".

Wertheim emphasised that the government is still working on the draft legislation, and that there will likely be further consultations as the process unfolds. "We all welcomed the Prime Minister's assurance that the government is 'not rushing this' and will continue to proceed in a measured and considered way."

"The Prime Minister praised the role that religious belief has played in community building", Wertheim said. "From the tenor of his comments and responses to our concerns, I felt reassured that the rights and freedoms of people of faith to practise and preach their beliefs, and the rights and freedoms of faith-based schools and institutions to operate in accordance with their ethos, will continue to be protected in accordance with international norms".

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