The Sydney Bi+ Network is an organisation dedicated to improving the wellbeing of bi+ (bisexual, pansexual, and other multi-gender attracted) people through education, advocacy, and community wellbeing. As a collective representing bi+ people from Sydney, Wollongong and the Central Coast, we emphatically reject the proposed Religious Discrimination Bill as it stands. We urge parliamentarians to protect LGBTQIA+ people equally alongside those who are religious.

This Bill presents an active danger to the community of people we represent. The enactment of the Marriage Amendment Act 2017 (Cwlth) must not be mistaken for the complete achievement of legally enshrined equity and equality for LGBTQIA+ people and to assume this is all that is needed is irresponsible and apathetic.

In the wake of Israel Folau’s public comments and the debate that followed his Instagram post regarding his perceived right to express his religious beliefs freely without risking his employment, it is imperative to highlight the dangers of legally protected homophobia and sexism and all forms of queerphobia.

As of today, people with one or more LGBTQIA+ identities continue to experience poor outcomes regarding health, housing and economic security. This is the harsh reality that is shamefully concealed behind the colourful celebrations of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and marriage equality. Research indicates that suicide attempts increase five-fold among LGB people, eleven-fold among trans and gender diverse and six-fold among intersex people, as reported by National LGBTI Health Alliance in their report titled “Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTI People.” A recent study from La Trobe University, suggests that for among cisgender bi+ people specifically:

- One in four have attempted suicide
- Approximately 80 per cent had considered self-harm or thought about committing suicide
- Over 60 per cent have high or very high current psychological distress
- 40 per cent reporting having had depression in the past

This research also showed that transgender and gender diverse bisexual people experienced even poorer mental health. A common misperception persists that LGBTQIA+ rights to equality and freedom of religion or belief are clashing rights, when those two are in fact interrelated. Freedom of religion or belief is neither a right of "religion", nor should it be an instrument to support religiously phrased limitations on human rights to equality. We should not accept harmful practices affecting people based on their beliefs as legitimate manifestations of freedom of religion or belief because one’s human rights claim cannot be used to extinguish other rights. Freedom of religion or belief can play a role in responding to harmful practices, but it should not allow someone’s religious laws to be imposed on others.

We join other Australian LGBTQIA+ organisations and community groups in their calls upon Parliament to appropriately protect religious or irreligious individuals and groups alongside, and not to the detriment of, LGBTQIA+ Australians.
In the spirit of giving everyone a fair go, we further urge those involved with the creation of the Religious Discrimination Bill to engage in an open-minded consultation with organisations and groups such as our own. LGBTQIA+ people must be equally considered and will not be left by the wayside.