As the pastor of an Anglican Church, I am personally somewhat sheltered from the concerns that Christian people have about religious freedom. We are still free, and will be free if the present bill becomes law, to gather as Christians and to teach from the Bible.

In making this submission, I am concerned for Christians in secular work, whose freedoms are under threat. I am writing from the viewpoint of Christianity, so I do not claim to speak for what Muslims, Hindus, etc. might want.

The freedoms which Christians feel should reasonably be protected are freedoms such as:
- the freedom of Christian schools to hire Christian staff in preference to non-Christian staff, in order to maintain the ethos of the school
- the freedom of Christian persons to hold to Christian sexual morality (sex reserved for marriage between a man and woman) and not be forced to seem to condone sex outside that model through, for example, an employer’s diversity policy
- the freedom of a Christian service provider respectfully to decline to be involved in something that offends their conscience (such as a same sex wedding)
- the freedom of a Christian doctor or other health professional to decline to be involved in abortion or euthanasia, notwithstanding State law
- the freedom of Christian parents to withdraw their children from programs like "Safe Schools" which may offend the conscience of the parents.

It is clear that the bill does not adequately protect these freedoms, for the reasons given to you in other submissions by Christian groups, which I do not need to recite.

May I respectfully suggest that the whole concept of a Religious DISCRIMINATION Bill, as distinct from a Religious FREEDOM Bill, is the wrong approach. What Christians want are POSITIVE FREEDOMS TO BE PROTECTED, not the right to SUE FOR DISCRIMINATION. Discrimination is an unwieldy legal concept which is already overused and is not well suited to protecting religious freedom. This is evident from the drafting of the bill.

What is required are in fact some positive affirmations which enshrine a right to "discriminate" in a way which is reasonable to enable Christian persons and organisations to maintain their integrity.

I would like to suggest that it will be good for our nation if Christians are given the freedom to live with this integrity. In support of this, may I point to just one article, available here: https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/09/56790/?fbclid=IwAR1Y5X0iEcQgSbNLYXJiXJTJc7v7yI34Mea2Yuu-
IrSpHI9lgl8ckLvOsY, which points to evidence that American schools which for religious reasons do NOT affirm LGBT behaviour, turn out to be the schools which provide the best pastoral care outcomes for LGBT students. Here is a quote from the article:

**LGBTQ-Affirming vs. Religion-Affirming Schools**

Consider the GLSEN 2017 School Environment Survey, which was referenced in California AB-493 to support promoting LGBTQ-affirmative practices for safe and welcoming schools. AB-493 encourages public and charter schools to use California Department of Education materials to train teachers regularly in using LGBTQ-affirming resources and strategies such as GLSEN recommends.

The GLSEN survey found that religious schools did not have LGBTQ-affirming curricula, clubs, website access, library resources, textbooks, teachers, administrators, or policies. From these findings, one might expect religious schools would be the most dangerous environment for sexual or gender minority students.

However, the survey actually found that religious schools ranked among the safest for LGBTQ students, with fewer anti-LGBTQ remarks among students than in public schools, and the least victimization and bullying of any schools. In fact, their rates of bullying were lower than those of the private non-religious schools that used all the suggested LGBTQ-affirmative educational methods (Appendix 2).

Meanwhile, religious teachers and students are experiencing harm in GLSEN-style schools. These teachers and students will enthusiastically help decrease bullying of LGBTQ students, but they cannot comply with the anti-religious dictates of state-promoted teacher training that pressures them to affirm beliefs about sexuality and gender that contradict their deeply-held religious beliefs. How can they effectively “welcome” sexual and gender minority students when they themselves feel bullied and ostracized at school?

The above is of course just one article, but may I suggest that the supposed harm that comes from Christian schools maintaining a stance against LGBT behaviour (while maintaining a deep love and care for the person) is more imagined than real.

What all of this amounts to is this: AS A CHRISTIAN PERSON, I AM ASKING THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT TO GRANT FREEDOMS TO CHRISTIANS, NOT MERELY FOR THE SAKE OF OUR OWN SELF-EXPRESSION, BUT BECAUSE IT WILL BE GOOD FOR SOCIETY TO HAVE CHRISTIAN PERSONS AND ORGANISATIONS (ESPECIALLY SCHOOLS) BEING FREE TO LIVE AND OPERATE ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE.

The Bill is inadequate for this in that:
- it creates a host of new grounds for "discrimination" complaints which will be used more by non-religious people against religious ones than vice versa (in light of the definition of "religious belief or activity")
- it provides virtually no protection at all for Christian schools hiring Christian teachers
- it defers to State legislation concerning the conscience of doctors and health professionals
- it provides significant scope for judicial opinion to rule against actions made in good conscience by religious people (I point especially to the word "vilify" in Section 8(4)(b): this should be deleted).

As to the detail of the bill, and how it interacts with other Commonwealth and State legislation, I am broadly supportive of the submission by Freedom for Faith, and so I will refrain from too much detailed comment here.

This discussion is fundamentally about the hot-button issues like same sex practice, abortion and euthanasia. These are the areas where the Christian position is different from society at large. Remembering that nearly 40% of Australians voted No in the plebiscite, it would not be fair or reasonable for the government to enact legislation which effectively states that the Christian viewpoint on LGBT issues is "beyond-the-pale". That puts 40% of Australia beyond the pale. That would be ridiculous. People who believe that same sex practice is wrong are not "haters", they are not dangerous, they are generally (if they are Christians) motivated by love and concern, and they should not be victimised. The present bill makes such victimisation probably even more likely than if it were not enacted.

Commonwealth Parliament, please create a bill which provides meaningful protection to Christian people who are simply trying to live according to their own conscience, with integrity, and with love for all Australians.