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## **ROXON BACK DOWN WELCOME, BUT DOESN'T GO FAR ENOUGH**

“Attorney-General Nicola Roxon’s back down today over her anti-free speech discrimination laws is welcome,” said Simon Breheny, director of the Legal Rights Project at free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

“The IPA was the first to point out that this draft Bill is an attack on freedom of speech. The first article in the Australian media which raised the freedom of speech concerns with this Bill was published in *The Australian* by the IPA on 23 November 2012.

“The IPA emailed every member of parliament the day after the draft Bill was released and told them that this was an attack on our fundamental freedoms. For three weeks we were the only ones talking about the threat this proposed law posed to the health of Australian democracy,” said Mr Breheny.

“Ms Roxon’s announcement today also comes after she assured the public in an article in *The Australian* on 10 January 2013 her proposed law would not restrict free speech. Today’s announcement is an admission that these claims were wrong.

“While welcome, the back down does not go anywhere near far enough. The draft Bill still reverses the burden of proof and forces defendants to pay all their own legal fees – even if they win the case. It still threatens religious liberty and undermines freedom of association.

“The idea that five separate anti-discrimination laws can be consolidated into one is flawed. The whole project should be abandoned,” said Mr Breheny.

The draft Bill is currently being considered by a Senate committee inquiry. It is due to hand down its recommendations on 18 February 2013.

“It is extraordinary that Ms Roxon is spruiking the benefits of public consultation over her proposed law but could not wait for the final report of the Senate committee before intervening with changes to the draft Bill,” said Mr Breheny.

### **For media and comment:**

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“Proposed Law A Further Attack On Free Speech”, Simon Breheny, *The Australian*, 23 November 2012: <http://ipa.org.au/sectors/legal-rights-project/news/2790/proposed-law-a-further-attack-on-free-speech>