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ABBOTT GOVERNMENT MUST PROCEED TO RESTORE FREE SPEECH

“Recent reports indicating that the Abbott government is about to back down on the proposed repeal of section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act* are deeply concerning,” said Simon Breheny, Director of the Legal Rights Project at free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

Fairfax newspapers today report that the government is considering backing down over its proposed amendments to section 18C.

On 25 March 2014, the Abbott government released exposure draft legislation which sought to repeal section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*. Section 18C currently makes it unlawful to “offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate” a person on the grounds of race, colour or national or ethnic origin. Section 18C was used against News Corp Australia journalist Andrew Bolt in 2011.

The IPA has long argued that section 18C is a restriction on freedom of speech and should be repealed – most recently in a submission to the Attorney-General’s Department.

“The Abbott government was elected after promising to repeal section 18C. If changes are made to the exposure draft the Abbott government risks breaking its election commitment on free speech,” said Mr Breheny.

“The Abbott government must proceed with the exposure draft in its current form. Weakening the exemption provision, expanding the definition provisions or making any other changes which broaden the scope of the exposure draft would be a disaster for free speech,” said Mr Breheny.

For further information and comment:

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The IPA’s submission to the Attorney-General’s Department consultation on changes to the *Racial Discrimination Act* can be downloaded at: <http://freedomwatch.ipa.org.au/ipa-submission-to-the-public-consultation-on-amendments-to-the-racial-discrimination-act-1975/>