

NATIONAL QUEENSLAND RACISM

What price will we accept for unchecked free speech, commissioner asks

By [Felicity Caldwell](#)

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It may be time to revisit Australia's implied freedom of political communication, Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Scott McDougall says.

Queensland Senator [Fraser Anning was roundly criticised](#) after the Christchurch terrorist attack for his comments linking Muslim immigration with violence.



Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner says there needs to be consequences for what people say.
MICHELLE SMITH

"The real cause of bloodshed on New Zealand streets today is the immigration program which allowed Muslim fanatics to migrate to New Zealand in the first place," Senator Anning said in a press release.

Mr McDougall said there was a need to "dismantle the business model" of people benefiting either psychologically or commercially from the creation of fear, ignorance and hate.

"That means there has to be consequences," he said.

"So the idea that anyone can go online and publish words that have real consequences for other people and not bear any responsibility for that, those days just have to end.

"Similarly, politicians need to be held to account for their use of language and whether they are licensing members of the community to engage in hate speech."

Mr McDougall said it might be time to examine the implied freedom of political communication courts have found exists in the Australian constitution.

"It may be that the implied freedom of political communication needs to be revisited to draw a line around what freedoms society ought to tolerate," he said.

"What is the price that we are prepared to accept for allowing unchecked free speech?"

Mr McDougall said there had been a growing tendency for leaders to seek to derive benefits by creating fear and division in the community over recent decades.

"Sometimes it's been very subtle and sometimes it's been absolutely un-subtle, as we've seen within the last week," he said.

"And there needs to be an appreciation that tolerance of racial hate in the community does increase the likelihood of people who are unhinged to act out what really amount to genocidal fantasies and that is a huge public safety issue.

Mr McDougall, who will raise the issue with his counterparts interstate, said there was far to go when it came to combating racism and bigotry in Australia.

"I'm not going to pretend that there are any simple answers to this complex global problem," he said, speaking outside the Community Legal Centres Queensland conference.

"The days of continuing to permit racial hate, to be perpetuated in the community unchecked, have simply got to come to an end."



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