



TELEPHONE: *President - Maria Proctor*
0438 630 450
EMAIL: *info@hsq.org.au*
WEBSITE: *www.hsq.org.au*

POSTAL ADDRESS
GPO Box 2041
Brisbane
QLD 4001

Dear Friends,

The Humanist Society of Queensland is this state's longest established society for Humanists, Rationalists and Free-thinkers. Our vision is of a world where every individual is treated with respect, regardless of religion, gender or ethnicity. We campaign for progressive law and policy reform that upholds equality and human rights. We are therefore deeply concerned about the government funding of almost exclusively evangelical Christian chaplains in our state schools.

Children in public schools may have problems they do not feel they can discuss with their teachers or parents. The Howard government's response to this issue was the launch The National Schools Chaplaincy Program (NSCP). In October 2006, the then Federal government pledged \$90 million of funding over three years for school chaplains; later this amount was increased to \$165 million. The Rudd government announced that it would honour these funding commitments. Placing chaplains in schools is a flagrant misuse of urgently needed funding for public schools.

Scripture Union (SU) supplies federally funded chaplains to Education Queensland. We feel SU embodies a narrow fundamentalism and is therefore a singularly inappropriate organisation to hold this exclusive Queensland State Government franchise. Scripture Union Australia's aims, mission statement and working principles are strongly evangelical. They state as the first point of their working principles "Evangelism and Teaching" that they "are committed to teaching basic Christian truths as an essential part of evangelism."

There is only one non-Christian chaplain in Queensland; it is therefore fair to say that SU chaplains are occupying a privileged, government funded position within our public schools. This breaches the spirit of Article 116 of the Australian Constitution which states: *"The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth."*

The Commonwealth funding of chaplains undermines the separation of church and state, which we believe to be essential in safeguarding freedom of religion and belief. Furthermore it is at odds with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981) ("the Religion Declaration") which are incorporated into Australian Law through the operation of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986.

One of the most concerning aspects of this issue is the potential division caused by this program, within school communities of different faiths. The public school system is for all children. A child with Lutheran, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Humanist or other parents who were not Protestant fundamentalists would probably not go to a Protestant fundamentalist chaplain. Unlike a trained counsellor, chaplains are limited by identification with a particular faith. At a time of ever increasing social pressures on children, what is needed is an enhancement of professional school counselling services.

The Humanist Society of Queensland would like to cooperate with any group, who feel as we do that the NCSP is not conducive to creating inclusive school communities. We want to unite with others who see the sense in what we say and wish to see a secular public school system, the only system that can respect individual rights by not placing the interests of any particular group (religious or non-religious) over another. As a start we would like to set up one or more public meetings with speakers who represent concerned groups. We would appreciate hearing your views and concerns and look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Maria Proctor (President of The Humanist Society of Queensland)