

Warning, Malik Report risks turning 'islamophobia' into a political weapon

 churchandstate.com.au/warning-malik-report-risks-turning-islamophobia-into-a-political-weapon

CAS News



Dr Terry Harding warns the Malik report could turn “Islamophobia” into a political weapon, embedding Islam-specific protections across government while threatening free speech, religious liberty and honest criticism of Islam.

Dr Terry Harding has warned that the Albanese Government's response to "Islamophobia" could become far more than a campaign against hatred. In his view, the Malik report risks creating a new legal, cultural and bureaucratic protection for Islam itself.

Harding, an education expert and one of the pioneers of homeschooling and non-government distance education in Australia, has written a detailed critique of Aftab Malik's report, *A National Response to Islamophobia: A Strategic Framework for Inclusion, Safety and Prosperity*. Malik was appointed as Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in 2024 and delivered his report to the Prime Minister in September 2025.

At first glance, many Australians may assume the report is simply about stopping abuse or mistreatment of Muslim citizens. No decent person wants innocent people harassed, threatened or attacked because of their religion, ethnicity or appearance. Harding makes that distinction clearly. He is not objecting to Muslim neighbours, Muslim families or peaceful Muslim Australians going about their lives.

His concern is different. He argues the report moves beyond equal protection for citizens and towards Islam-specific political preferment.

That is why the word "Islamophobia" matters so much. Malik's own report acknowledges there is no universally accepted definition of the term and says it does not seek to define it. Yet the same report proposes national action to combat it across government, education, law, media, sport, health, public service and political culture.

For Harding, that is not a small drafting weakness. It is a foundational problem. A vague term can be stretched. In the hands of governments, bureaucracies, regulators, universities and courts, an undefined accusation can become a weapon. Criticism of religious claims, Islamic doctrine, political Islam, sharia, or the treatment of women, converts, Jews, Christians and homosexuals under Islamic systems could be recast as hostility toward Muslim people.

That is how blasphemy laws enter the conversation. Not necessarily by name. Not necessarily in one dramatic Act of Parliament. But by building a culture in which one religion receives special insulation from scrutiny while other beliefs remain open to criticism.

Harding's critique notes that Malik's report contains 54 recommendations directed at 12 Commonwealth departments and institutions. On his count, those recommendations contain about 180 proposed changes, adjustments or applications. The list includes the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, Home Affairs, the Attorney-General's Department, Education, Health, Foreign Affairs, the Australian Sports Commission, Social Services, Employment and Workplace Relations, Infrastructure, and even the Parliament of Australia itself.

This is not a narrow anti-harassment proposal. It is a whole-of-government project.

One of Harding's major concerns is the proposal for more inclusive recruitment practices in the Australian Public Service, including improved retention and leadership pathways for minority and diverse communities. In a multicultural country, governments can speak easily about inclusion. But Harding warns that when those policies are tied to the concerns of one religious community, they begin to look like religious preference.

“The public service should be on a promotional staircase and pathway by merit, not by religious preference.”

He also points to section 116 of the Australian Constitution, which prohibits the Commonwealth from establishing any religion or imposing a religious test for public office. Harding is not claiming the report itself changes the Constitution. His point is that governments should be extremely cautious about policies that appear to elevate one religion for special treatment within the machinery of the state.

The report also recommends recognising 15 March as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia and calls for inquiries into Islamophobia and anti-“Palestinian” and anti-Arab racism. It proposes data collection, oversight mechanisms and coordination across multiple agencies. Supporters will see that as a serious response to prejudice. Harding sees something more dangerous: the normalisation of permanent bureaucratic machinery built around a contested and undefined concept.

The timing makes the issue more significant. Australia is still dealing with the consequences of the Bondi terrorist attack and the national reckoning over antisemitism. Harding believes it is wrong to imply a moral equivalence between the documented crisis facing Jewish Australians and a sweeping claim that Australia is systemically hostile to Muslims, especially when that claim is used to justify changes across the nation's institutions.

Christians should be clear-eyed here. Hatred of Muslims – anyone – is wrong. Violence and intimidation are wrong. Lies, cruelty and mob behaviour are wrong. Yet Christian charity does not require political naivety. A nation can protect Muslim citizens from mistreatment without granting Islam privileged protection from debate.

Harding also believes the Church must stop retreating from public responsibility. The answer is not panic, bitterness or hatred. It is repentance, courage and action. Christians are called to be salt and light in this world, not silent observers while the moral foundations of the nation are rewritten without them.

His practical advice is simple: read the Malik report, read the critique, and contact your federal MP. Ask whether the Prime Minister intends to adopt the recommendations. Ask whether freedom of speech, freedom of religion and equality before the law will be

protected. Ask whether criticism of Islam will remain equally lawful with Christianity in Australia.

Australia does not need personal hostility. It does not need a two-tier society either.

The question raised by Harding is whether the Malik report protects people from hatred, or protects an ideology from scrutiny. That question deserves far more public attention than it has received.