
THE AUSTRALIAN

Safety fears at Christian charities

Mark Allaby.

DENNIS SHANAHAN THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM March 28, 2017

Two Christian charities have been granted official permission to keep their board members' names secret on the grounds of "public safety", after abuse and threats from gay activists forced an IBM executive to sever his links with a Christian education group.

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission yesterday agreed to keep the boards of the Lachlan Macquarie Institute and the Australian Christian Lobby off the public record because publication "could endanger public safety".

The Lachlan Macquarie Institute and the ACL applied to the commission last week after militant gay rights activists targeted marriage equality advocate IBM Australia for employing Mark Allaby, who was on the Institute's board. Both organisations removed the details of their boards and staff from their websites last week, as gay activists increased pressure on IBM and started to circulate the names and jobs of the Christian board members.

The charities commission took all the details of the two charities off its register, a public record, on receiving the request to keep the names private. After agreeing to the request, the commission put the details of the two Christian charities back on its register yesterday with the names of "responsible people" withheld.

The commission does not routinely grant requests for privacy of board members but has done so in the past for registered charities such as women's shelters fearful of violence.

Tim Wilson and Andrew Hastie, the Liberal MPs whose same-sex marriage debate "over a Coopers beer" was at the centre of the boycott of the Adelaide' brewery, both criticised the need for the removal of names from the public register because of threats.

Mr Hastie, who opposes same-sex marriage, said "freedom of conscience, speech and association are being suppressed and dissent is silenced".

"Australians should be deeply concerned by these developments," Mr Hastie said. "If this is the pattern now, what will happen if SSM is legislated?"

"What will happen to individuals, religious institutions, charities and schools who don't share in the new morality?"

Mr Wilson, who campaigns for same-sex marriage and freedom of speech, said: "I utterly condemn the necessity for the need for this action. Freedom means freedom for everyone, including people of faith and also those who have been discriminated by them. This case is another reminder of the need for respectful dialogue.

"The ACL has regularly been quick to charge malice against those they disagree with, and unsurprisingly people reciprocate in-kind. Neither are covering themselves in glory. The best way to do so is to engage with mutual respect, which means disagreeing without being disagreeable and people thinking before acting."

Mr Allaby resigned from the Lachlan Macquarie Institute board last week after the public campaign against IBM. Last year, when he was employed by PricewaterhouseCoopers, gay activists pressured him into standing down from the board of the ACL, which opposes same-sex marriage.

Last week *The Australian* revealed activists had attacked the IT giant for hiring Mr Allaby as a Sydney-based managing partner, claiming his role on the board of the institute, which organises internships for young Christians, is not compatible with IBM's public support for same-sex marriage.

As part of the campaign, led by Michael Barnett, convener of Jewish LGBTI support group Aleph Melbourne, and Rod Swift, a Greens candidate in the 2014 state election, IBM was accused of "hypocrisy" and lists of ACL board members and their jobs were put on Twitter. The charity register was also searched and board members' names circulated.

After ACL took down people's names from its website "for security reasons", the organisation was mocked by activists and Mr Barnett — known as mikeybear — was asked if he wanted someone "to fix this one up for you?"

Last week Mr Barnett posted on Twitter: "A bad look ... that IBM managing partner Mark Allaby sits on the anti-LGBT Lachlan Macquarie Institute board."

He also said: "As an LGBT champion @IBMAustralia, why did you employ a board member of a high-profile anti-LGBT organisation."

Mr Swift called on IBM to "request this guy to step down" from the institute.

Last night a spokesman for the Lachlan Macquarie Institute confirmed Mr Allaby was no longer on the board. IBM has not commented on Mr Allaby's position.

The social media campaign against IBM for hiring Mr Allaby and the charities commission's actions follow suggestions within the Liberal Party that there will be an attempt to revive a debate on same-sex marriage before the end of this week. Two weeks ago 20 corporate leaders, including IBM managing director Kerry Purcell, pressured Malcolm Turnbull in a letter to drop the Liberal policy of a plebiscite and Cooper's Brewery was forced to disassociate the company from the Bible Society because of a boycott threat over the video debate between Mr Hastie and Mr Wilson.

ACL managing director Lyle Shelton said last night the application was made to the charities commission to take the names off the public register in the "interests of safety and security". As well he said, the ACL had a right to appoint board members and "people should be free to support marriage between a man and a woman".

"This has been a case of vicious victimisation and the message is that if you 'believe' you will be demonised at work," Mr Shelton said. "This campaign has attacked the freedom of association. Same-sex marriage activists are intolerant and have co-opted some in the corporate sector to assist them in enforcing this to the point where people fear for their jobs."



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