



PRESS RELEASE - URGENT
ESSENDON - THORBURN RESIGNATION

STATEMENT FROM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LEADERS

7th October, 2022

The Presbyterian Church of Australia is deeply concerned at recent events surrounding the resignation of Andrew Thorburn as chief executive of the AFL's Essendon Football Club. We believe that this marks a watershed moment in Australian history – the day we have departed from some well-established common law principles, where there was freedom of conscience and religion, to being a society where only certain views are permitted in public life.

While Israel Folau was discriminated against for his own beliefs, we note that Mr Thorburn was forced to resign from his post merely because of the particular church he belongs to. There is apparently now a religious test for significant employment posts in Australia.

We note that the ethical position Mr Thorburn's church—*City on a Hill*—takes on the subjects of abortion and sexuality, are the same as that of the mainline Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths.

Will the Essendon Football Club now no longer welcome people who have sincere religious convictions from being involved with the club, at either an administrative, coaching or playing level? GWS player Haneen Zreika has announced she will be opting out of the upcoming AFLW pride round. Will she be hounded out because of her faith?

Essendon Football Club says it supports “wholeheartedly the work of the AFL in continuing to stamp out any discrimination based on race, sex, ‘religion’, gender, sexual identity or orientation, or physical or mental disability”, whilst at the same time forcing Mr Thorburn to resign because of his religion. This looks rather like speaking out of both sides of one's mouth.

We are in a dangerous place as a nation when a premier can seek to impose his own personal ideologies on everyone else. Such behaviour is itself “appalling, hateful, bigoted, unkind and exclusive”.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia will continue to uphold the Bible's teaching, that marriage should only ever be between a man and a woman, and that the lives of unborn babies must always be protected. This is for both the flourishing of families and all of human life. There is nothing loving about killing unborn children and promoting an anti-life view of marriage.

We pray for our political leaders and remind them that they, like us all, will one day have to give account before Almighty God. We also urge our people to pray, stand firm for the faith, and not give into the opposition from those who reject our Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. Finally, we ask those whom God has placed in authority over us in this world, for the freedom to live out our faith, without intolerant bullying.

Signed:

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