

beyondblue Chairman Jeff Kennett challenges the Australian Christian Lobby

beyondblue Chairman, The Hon. Jeff Kennett has written to Mr Jim Wallace, the Managing Director of the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL)

In the letter, Mr Kennett offered to speak at the ACL's national conference in October, following the cancellation yesterday by the Prime Minister of her scheduled speech. Prime Minister Gillard withdrew from the conference following comments made by Mr Wallace comparing the deleterious health outcomes of smoking with those of gay marriage.

Mr Kennett said he does not deny the individual's right to comment, but when language is discriminatory or racist, it should immediately be answered by those with different views.

Mr Kennett said: "For the Prime Minister to cut and run from the conference denies the vast majority of Australians the opportunity to have a more tolerant and accepted view conveyed in that forum.

"This is all too reminiscent of the beginnings of the Pauline Hanson period, when political leaders of the time failed to challenge her views on immigration.

"Discrimination is never acceptable, whether it's about people with physical or intellectual disabilities, or because of people's sexuality or gender identity.

"I challenge the Australian Christian Lobby to allow me to speak at their national conference in October to put a more temperate, and I suspect, a more Christian view because nowhere in the Bible do I find the act of discrimination acceptable," Mr Kennett said.

beyondblue CEO Kate Carnell AO supported Mr Kennett's action and agreed that the ACL's national conference would be a good opportunity to put the record straight and refute the unfortunate misconception that being gay, lesbian, bi, trans or intersex (GLBTI) is a lifestyle choice.

"beyondblue has been working with the GLBTI community for two years and this week, we launched a campaign to reduce discrimination and stigma against GLBTI people who are at least two to three times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the broader community. GLBTI people are also at greater risk of suicide and self-harm.

"Mr Wallace's linking of the deleterious outcomes of smoking with gay marriage is ludicrous. Suggesting that same-sex marriage is bad for the health of GLBTI people is simply wrong – as well as being offensive. The thing that is bad for GLBTI people's health is discrimination, such as the remarks made by Mr Wallace.

"I encourage Mr Wallace to accept Mr Kennett's challenge, to open his eyes, ears and more importantly, his heart and to take a more Christian and evidence-based approach to his fellow men and women who are gay, lesbian, bi, trans or intersex," Ms Carnell said.

To view videos and TV ads for beyondblue's antidiscrimination campaign go to www.beyondblue.org.au or www.lefthand.org.au

Mr Kennett is overseas. For further comment, beyondblue CEO, Ms Kate Carnell is available.

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