

ACT Jews, Rabbis at loggerheads over same-sex marriage bill

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CANBERRA'S Jewish community has distanced itself from a statement by Canberra faith leaders, including Rabbi Shmueli Feldman, slating the ACT's historic bill legalising same-sex marriage.

In an Australian first, the ACT legislature on Tuesday passed the Marriage Equality Same Sex Act 2013 by nine votes to eight with the support of the Labor government and one Greens member.

On Monday a statement was issued by the Abrahamic Leaders of Canberra, with Rabbi Feldman, the head rabbi and chairman of Chabad ACT as a signatory. "We are concerned for the long-term risks of such a bill for our society," the statement read.

"While affirming the inherent dignity of all human beings, our faith traditions also affirm the traditional concept of marriage between a man and a woman as being for the good of the individual, the family and society."

But the ACT Jewish Community Inc issued a statement, saying such views were not representative of the community.

"Our members would certainly offer strong support for tolerance and acceptance of diversity, but would also hold a wide range of views on the ACT



From left: Imam Adama Konda of the Canberra Islamic Centre, Vicar General of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn Monsignor John Woods, and Rabbi Feldman, issuing the statement.

Marriage Equality Bill," said president Robert Cussel on behalf of the board.

He added that Rabbi Feldman is not the "Rabbi for Canberra and Region" as the Australian Christian Lobby labelled him when posting the statement, but the Rabbi for Chabad ACT, a separate religious organisation not affiliated with the ACT Jewish Community.

Aleph Melbourne, a group supporting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people in Melbourne's Jewish community, expressed disappointment with the statement.

Rabbi Feldman said the statement reflected the views of the Organisation of Rabbis of Australasia (ORA), of

which he is a member. "My signing of the Abrahamic faith petition was in consultation with the president of ORA and is consistent with the ORA, Rabbinical Council of Victoria and Rabbinical Council of NSW's well-known positions," he told *The AJN*.

Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen of the Institute for Judaism and Civilisation convened the multi-faith meeting where the statement was proposed.

Joanne Cohen, president of Jewish GLBTI group Dayenu in Sydney, said that given the Jewish people come from a minority of hardship and discrimination, "it's time that we stop hating and start to focus on love, faith and tradition".