



Submission to the Procedure and Privileges Committee's inquiry into the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders

5 March 2026

Dear Chair and committee members,

This is a submission by the Rationalist Society of Australia (RSA), which is Australia's oldest freethought organisation promoting reason, secularism and evidence-based policy. We are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission to the Procedure and Privileges Committee's inquiry into the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders.

We urge the committee to recommend modernisation of the Standing Orders, in line with best practice, by replacing the observance of daily prayers with a secular and more welcoming and inclusive practice that better reflects the West Australian community.

[In the Standing Orders](#), item 20 in chapter 4 requires the Speaker to say 'prayers' at the commencement of proceedings each day and following the Acknowledgement of Country. As such, 'Prayers' is listed as an item on the order of business, as appears in the *Notice Paper*.

Neither the Standing Orders nor the order of business specify what form of prayers should be observed. They do not determine the religion that should be represented or the content of the prayers.

Yet, in practice, the Legislative Assembly observes exclusively Christian prayers. At the commencement of proceedings each day, the Speaker reads the following prayers, including the Lord's Prayer:

"Almighty God, we humbly beseech thee to vouchsafe thy special blessing upon this parliament now assembled, and that they would be pleased to direct and prosper all our



consultations to the advancement of thy glory and to the true welfare of the people of Western Australia.”

“Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our tresspasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”

The imposition of acts of religious worship – and, in particular, worship in one favoured religious tradition – is completely at odds with the principle of separation of church and state. Public institutions, especially the parliament, should be secular and should not privilege religion or have a favoured religion. Such institutions should promote social cohesion, provide equal treatment to all people, and be welcoming of all, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs.

This is an issue of fundamental human rights. Imposing acts of religious worship is discriminatory on the grounds of religion and belief. It is exclusionary and sends a message to many people in the community that they are not welcome. Last year, our organisation – supported by another eight non-religious, ex-religious and pro-secular community groups – raised the issue of prayers in government institutions as part of a [submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) into Australia's human rights](#). The submission to the UPR argued that it was an example of discriminatory and unfair treatment against non-religious people in government institutions and programs, and said it constituted a breach of Australia's international human rights commitments to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.

The practice is alienating for many members of the parliament who are not religious or Christian. Members of parliament are elected to represent their communities, not to “advance the glory” of one particular religious community’s deity. In their place of work, elected representatives should be able to participate fully instead of having to decide whether to remove themselves from the chamber for the duration of the prayers.

The practice is also, clearly, at odds with Western Australia’s own [Equal Opportunity Act 1984](#), which aims to eliminate discrimination against people on the grounds of religious conviction, and aims to promote equality regardless of religious conviction. It is, therefore, hypocritical for the parliament to hold a different standard than is applied to everyone else in Western Australia.



The imposition of Christian worship also fails to reflect modern Western Australia, the population of which is rich in religious and, increasingly, non-religious diversity. [Based on the 2021 national Census results](#), the proportion of the state's population that identified as not religious (42.8 per cent) was *already larger* than that identifying as Christian (41.1 per cent). Based on the trends, 'No religion' will grow even further at this year's Census, likely to approach 50 per cent. Meanwhile, Christianity is expected to fall to between 30-40 per cent of the West Australian population. And it is important to note that, for the Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses a biased question ('What is the person's religion?') that *inflates the religion result* – by as much as 11 points, according to several public surveys.

Momentum for change on this issue has been building across the country. Local governments across Australia are increasingly adopting best-practice and replacing acts of religious worship in their meetings with practices that are more inclusive and welcoming for all. Such new practices include secular civic statements and moments of silence for all members to reflect on their duties or pray according to their own wishes and beliefs.

The ACT's Legislative Assembly removed prayers and adopted a moment of silent reflection in the 1990s. Last year, the Tasmanian upper house reformed its practice by removing the Lord's Prayer. As the Legislative Council's [Standing Orders there still required 'prayer' to be observed](#), however, a short prayer has remained in place. Meanwhile, the Victorian Labor government promised in 2021 to replace prayers in that state's parliament with a model "[purpose-fit for Victoria](#)". The Allan government is yet to deliver on that promise.

We urge the committee to do the right thing by members of parliament and the wider community, and modernise the Standing Orders to replace prayers with a secular and more welcoming and inclusive practice.

Si Gladman

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