



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

**Cults in Australia: Facing
the Realities Conference**

SPEECH

Wednesday, 2 November 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Boyce, Sen Sue

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Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (13:55): I bring to the Senate's attention an important conference that is happening here today on the topic of cults. The conference is called Facing the Realities in Australia. It has been organised by a wonderful group called Cult Information and Family Support. It does a great job of supporting people who have been extremely damaged by their involvement with cults and similar organisations. The speaking list for this conference is an absolute credit to the service. It includes former Australian of the year Professor Patrick McGorry, to whom I have just finished listening, and two international speakers: a French gentleman named Monsieur Georges Fenech, from MIVILUDES, which is a French government organisation, probably unique in the world, that works to monitor and counter what are referred to as sectarian deviations, or perhaps in our parlance, deviance; and Mr Tom Sackville from the UK, who is president of an organisation called FECRIS, a European based organisation that works in the same way as MIVILUDES to monitor, educate and inform people about the problems that can be caused by cults. FECRIS now has branches in 26 countries and is one of the very few organised groups working to assist people who have been damaged by cults and by other organisations that use methods such as mind control to control people.

I have no truck whatsoever with the idea that we as a government should in any way try to influence the sorts of organisations that people belong to, the sorts of things they believe in or the ways in which they behave. At the same time, we cannot allow some organisations to hide behind the idea of democracy and political freedom in order to abuse, control and manipulate vulnerable people.

There are 85 people attending this conference in Parliament House today. All of them have stories to tell about the effects of cults and similar organisations on their lives. There is evidence from the Attorney-General's Department that over half a million Australians are adversely affected directly by the behaviours of cults. This includes people who have been members of cults and the families and friends of those people. Half a million people is a very significant number, and we as a nation need to work out a way to do more to help the people who are caught in these cults and who have been damaged by them. Professor McGorry made the points that often people who speak

out about the deviant behaviours of some cults have punitive action taken against them, that these cults often target vulnerable young people who may be experiencing mental health issues and that we must act to broaden our ability to assist people to get out of cults and remain healthy. I have some hope that the way in which we have broadened the definition of family violence and abuse may assist here, because for the first time we are seriously trying to look at criminalising significant and severe psychological and emotional abuse. I hope this will assist. (*Time expired*)

The PRESIDENT: Order! The time for the debate has expired.